

BRETHREN, WE ARE AT WAR!

Ephesians 6: 10-20

This past week has been a week that I will never forget. Many of you know that my brother Marshall has been seriously ill. One week ago yesterday Marshall went to the Alexander City hospital to supposedly be treated for a simple infection he's had in the past but this time had just gotten a little more involved in his system. But we all expected that with a couple of bags of fluids and some common antibiotics he would be home in a couple of days. Not so. In a couple of days he was being transferred to the Trinity Hospital Medical Intensive Care Unit in Birmingham with an unknown infection, and about 3:45 Wednesday morning we were awakened by a phone call telling us to get to the hospital. For several hours we were unsure if Marshall would live; hopeful, but still uncertain. Well, today Marshall is well on the way to going home. He expects a 100% recovery in time. But his doctor at Trinity told him that he came close to death.

But something else happened this week that was monumental for all of us. It was the response by Christians and others with traditional moral values to an unprecedented attack on our free enterprise system by a few politicians who are sympathetic to the gay rights movement. But the attack was much more than an attack on free enterprise. It was an attack by gays themselves on a holy law of God, the law that states marriage is to be between one man and one woman. And now the cry of some mayors or aldermen is that Chick-fil-A should be denied access to their cities because of the religious beliefs of their owners. Friends, do not fail to see the magnitude of this issue. It is another blow to part of the very infrastructure of our nation, the pillar of religious freedom.

But as I thought about these two happenings this week, an old truth became alive again in my heart that I believe is key to understanding the times in which we live. It is key to understanding how we as believers in Jesus Christ can live lives that honor God, which is our purpose on the planet. And the key is **the people of God are in continuous spiritual warfare**. This world is not a playground for the Christian, it is a battleground! We are at war with an unseen enemy whose agenda is our destruction, the destruction of our testimony, and the defeat of God's kingdom. This enemy is a real, personal devil. Peter writes, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). And Peter knew what he was talking about. Because Jesus told Peter on one occasion, "Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31). And Satan did sift Peter as wheat, and he's still in the sifting business

with many believers today. We don't have to look very far around at all to see that many believers are losing many battles in this spiritual warfare in which we are engaged. A little over a year ago I clipped a letter to the editor of a Christian magazine that illustrates what I mean. It is written by a 22 year old Christian young lady. Let me quote her:

"I'd like to thank Chuck Colson for his focus on doctrine (Colson wrote an article about doctrine entitled Spiritual Boot Camp in a previous issue of the magazine). I am 22, grew up in church, and rarely hear doctrinal preaching any more. People my age who claim to be Christians think premarital sex is just fine, entertain serious thoughts about evolution and compromise on the authority of Scripture".

She goes on to issue a plea to pastors to preach more doctrine or at least quit complaining about the demise of the younger generation. That is a well spoken plea, but let me say to you parents that you are ultimately responsible for the spiritual health of your children. But did you notice what she said about many young professing Christians? They are quite comfortable with premarital sex, evolution, and a Bible contaminated with error. And if they are saved at all they are losing their battles with Satan. And they will suffer for it and so will the honor of Christ. But they are merely walking in the footsteps of us parents and grandparents who've preceded them, for many of us are losing spiritual battles right and left.

Every time a Christian couple divorces Satan has won a spiritual battle. Every time a Christian has sexual relations outside of marriage Satan has won a spiritual battle. But every time you entertain lustful thoughts Satan has won a spiritual battle. No matter what excuse you may offer, when you do not even come close to giving 10% of your gross income to God, Satan is winning spiritual battles in your life. When you harbor bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart, Satan is winning spiritual battles. Every time you pass along a rumor about someone or even a truth that is unkind, Satan wins a spiritual battle. Young people, when you cheat on a test Satan wins a spiritual battle. When over 10,000 SBC churches do not baptize even one convert every year, Satan is winning spiritual battles! I don't know about you, but I'm ready to see God's people to be in front on the scoreboard! We know that we are going to win the game in the end. We've read the last chapter of the Book. But bless God, it is not His will that we come from behind in the last 30 seconds to do it! So today I want us to begin to look at how God has equipped us to win our spiritual battles. And I pray that by His grace all of us will be able to win many more than we lose in the days ahead.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Ephesians 6:10-20. In our text this morning God gives us three precious truths to understand, and if we understand them and act accordingly we will be assured of victory in all of our spiritual battles. And the first truth that we see is **the empowerment of the soldier**. If a soldier is going to be a good soldier then he must be stronger than the enemy, both physically and mentally. And friends, our enemy is powerful. In Scripture we read that Satan has power to perform miracles. He empowered the magicians of Pharaoh's court to do numerous miracles exactly like the miracles of Moses. Job tells us that Satan had the power to cause raging storms (Job 1) and to inflict severe illness (Job 2) and even take life (Job 1). And Paul writes that Satan empowers false prophets who masquerade as angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). These have deceived many ever since the Fall to their eternal destruction, and one day Satan will empower the greatest deceiver of them all, the Antichrist, to perform signs and wonders and speak with a golden tongue and lead billions and billions to their doom (2 Thessalonians 3:9-12). Beloved, you and I are no match for such power! And this is the reason that the very first word that God gives the Christian soldier is, "Be strong in the **Lord** and in the power of **His might**" (verse 10).

I want to share some thoughts with you about the power of God's might for a few minutes, with the help of the great old English preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones. I mentioned a moment ago that Satan is a powerful enemy, and indeed he is. But beloved, I also want to remind you that Satan was created by our God and God has given Satan every ounce of power that he has. And God says through the apostle John, "Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 5:4). God's power is so much greater than Satan's that Jesus declared that He saw Satan fall like lightning from Heaven (Luke 10:18). That would have been at Satan's initial rebellion at the beginning of the ages, when as Lucifer he tried to climb up on God's throne and rule right along side of him. And God said, "What insane presumption! I will not share My glory with another!" And in a nanosecond Satan fell from God's most favored angel to His doomed arch enemy. And God displayed His mighty power.

At the very outset of Jesus' ministry the Holy Spirit drew Him into the wilderness to demonstrate His authority over Satan, and three times Satan unleashed every weapon in hell against Him in order to cause Him to sin, and all three times Satan was utterly crushed. In Mark 5 Jesus sought out a man who had a legion of demons, and a Roman legion numbered 6000. And Jesus cast out those thousands of demons into a herd of hogs just as quickly as His Father cast Satan out of Heaven. So how much more powerful is our God than Satan in

head to head conflict? About as much as if the New York Giants lined up across the scrimmage line from a Myrtlewood pee wee team.

Now, beloved, I want to point out that if you are saved today you have already experienced this mighty power of God in your life. Paul writes in Romans 1:16 that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. It was the power of God **alone** that wrenched you out of Satan's clutches and brought you out of eternal death into eternal life. Jonah put it plainly when he was delivered from drowning by the great fish. Jonah said, "Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). But the power of God not only saved you, but it also is working this very moment to keep you saved. Peter writes that we are **kept by the power of God** through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:5). This salvation is at the rapture, when our glorified bodies will be raised from the grave, and God's power is keeping us safe until that glorious day. I want you to think about this for a moment. There is nothing that the devil would rather do than steal you away from the Good Shepherd's fold if he could. John writes, "The thief comes to steal, kill and destroy". But Satan cannot touch a child of God! We are so secure in Jesus Christ that David says in the 23rd Psalm that He prepares a feast for us to sit down and enjoy while our enemies are peering upon us all around, frustrated and powerless to harm us.

So let's stop and put this all together. You and I are in spiritual warfare, a war against Satan and all of the powers of hell. He is seeking to devour us and destroy our witness for Christ. He is a powerful enemy, and therefore God says to us, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might". And the power of God is infinite compared to the power of Satan, and God's power has already been operative in our lives, saving us and keeping us saved every day.

But I want to remind you of the first part of God's command. He says to us, "Be strong in the Lord". That's a whole lot better than "May the force be with you", isn't it? For beloved, the power of God is not some sort of mysterious "force". The power of God is a Person, a Person Who lives in you, the Lord Jesus Christ. And I declare to you that Jesus stands ready and is just as eager to defeat the devil in your life right now as He defeated him when He walked upon the earth! Listen to what Jesus said to His disciples, "Behold, I give you the authority...over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). In Ephesians 1 Paul prays that the Ephesians might know the exceeding greatness of God's power unto those who believe. And just how great is this power that is ours? He goes on to say that it is the power "which He worked in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:20). Paul says, "I can do all things through Christ Who gives me strength" (Philippians

4:13). And what God wants you and me to do is simply believe it. Get into His Word, read the accounts of His miraculous deliverances of His people in the Old Testament and the New and let them permeate your soul. Find a promise to claim concerning God's power for you. Then claim it, and go out and fight your battles knowing that what God did for His followers of old He will do for you! Beloved, this is first base in spiritual warfare. We must know the source of our power. And God says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might."

But there is a second truth we must know and understand to win our spiritual battles. Not only **the empowerment of the soldier**, but also **the enlightenment** of the soldier (Ephesians 11-12). Paul says that we are to stand against the wiles of the devil, that is, the schemes of the devil. And then he goes on to say that our fight is not against human forces, but against spiritual ones, and as we've seen these spiritual forces are not The Comic Society of Weak Sisters. They are principalities, which means they are those who govern, they are powers, they are the world rulers of darkness. In short, they are all demons and their commander is Satan himself.

Now, I want us to take a closer look at this description of our enemies. We've seen that they are powerful, but Paul also says that they are scheming, they are deceiving. And one of the ways they deceive is to blind our eyes to the fact they are even there. Adversity comes into our lives and we never consider that it just could be of spiritual origin. That it could be from the devil to thwart the great purposes of God. And Paul says that we **wrestle** with our spiritual enemies, these principalities, powers and rulers of darkness. The Greek word for "wrestle" refers to a hand-to-hand fight, up close and personal. I had a friend in Aliceville who was a Vietnam veteran. And he actually engaged a Viet Cong in hand-to-hand combat on one occasion. This is how close Jesus did battle with Satan no telling how many times in His ministry, but we know of three. Once at the beginning of His ministry that we mentioned earlier; another time was when Peter counseled Him to bypass the cross, when He said, "Get behind Me, Satan". And though we can't refer to chapter and verse, the third was undoubtedly when in Gethsemane His sweat was as great drops of blood, as Satan tried to persuade Him one last time to bail out of His mission to the cross. And beloved, you can be sure that if Satan attacked Jesus in such a personal way that he will do the same with you and me.

Beloved, I believe it is very possible that several members of my family experienced such an attack this past week through Marshall's illness. Let me tell you why. First of all, because of the timing of his illness. It just so happened that Marshall got sick the very same time my other brother, my sister, her

husband, my nephew, and two others were preparing for a mission trip to Kenya. Many of you remember Ruth Owar, a Kenyan Christian who spoke in our church several months ago. Well, Ruth has now gone back to Kenya to head up the work in the orphanage that she founded and supported while she was in the United States. And my family and their friends were to leave this past Friday going to Kenya for a week of ministry, including a groundbreaking ceremony for a new orphanage. But Marshall's illness threw their plans all up in the air. Should they go or should they stay?

Well, beloved, I believe that Satan did not want them to go and that he also wanted to devour Marshall's life, just like Simon Peter said. And the spiritual battle concerning Marshall's life and the Kenyan trip all came to a head early Wednesday morning. Marshall had a rough night on Monday night, but on Tuesday he had his first fever free day in ten days. His vital signs were good all day, and we all went to bed Tuesday night encouraged. But then in the wee hours of Wednesday morning Marshall began to have serious heart problems. His heart got out of rhythm at total of five times, increasing his heart rate to over 200 beats per minute each time. Most of those times his heart had to be stopped and shocked back into rhythm. His blood pressure dropped to 45 at least once. The battle had begun.

After being called to the hospital Wednesday morning, my sister and her husband, my brother and his pastor, and Janice, Emily and I had all arrived within 15 minutes of each other. When my sister arrived she asked, "Have we prayed?" We had not, so we all went into a conference room with Marshall's wife Ava and her sister and began to cry out to God, pleading for Marshall's life. That lasted a good while, then Ava went to check on him. He was OK at the moment, but not long afterwards he began to have his sixth rhythmic dysfunction.

I think it was just after this that my sister came into the room where we were all sitting and announced in military command style, "OK. We're about to get some continuous prayer going for Marshall. We're going to pray all day that God will heal him". And that's what we did. We all took turns going into the prayer chapel at Trinity, two, three or four of us at a time, and from about 8:30 until about 4:00 that afternoon the prayer chapel was never vacant except for maybe fifteen minutes. And I must tell you it was the closest thing to warfare praying that I've ever been involved in in my life. We read Scripture, we claimed promises for healing, we sang praises to God. We prayed that Marshall would be so much improved by Thursday morning that the doctors would be amazed and that Charlotte and Mark and the rest would know without a doubt that they

should not cancel their trip to Kenya, and they had to make the decision Thursday morning. And it went on for about eight hours. And many of you knew about Marshall and you were praying, too. And many others from Alex City, Dothan, and all over were praying.

What was the result of all of that? Well, God heard the prayers of His people! Marshall did not have another heart episode after we began to pray. He slept all the way through the night Wednesday night, the first sleep he had had in five days. And the doctor came in Thursday morning and told him that he felt good about how much he had improved. At one point he said, "God was in on this one." In fact, Marshall improved so much that he went from his life being in question on Wednesday morning to being moved into a private room late Thursday afternoon. And the Kenyan mission team is ministering in Kenya as we speak. To God be the glory!

So what did I learn from this experience?

1. **Spiritual warfare is real!** So we must be on the alert, for our adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8).
2. **God will hear the desperate cries of His children.**
3. **God's children need to get desperate!** We need to remember that God's mighty power already resides in us in Christ, and to be strong in Him!