

KEEPERS OF THE KINGDOM: VBS
“Forever and Always” Ephesians 6:10-14
July 16, 2023

INTRO.: Many of you know that we just finished a great week of Vacation Bible School. As one of the shepherds of this flock, I am very thankful for all those who helped in so many ways: decorating, building backdrops, setting up, recreation, crafts, singing, drama, kitchen crew, teaching, leading groups, missions, security, and most important of all, praying. We had some young people pray to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior!!! How awesome is that?? Our theme for the week was *Keepers of the Kingdom* from Ephesians 6, reminding everyone that we are in a spiritual battle. Ephesians is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in the city of Ephesus. This was an important port city on the west coast of Asia, and its claim to fame was the temple of Artemis (one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world). The citizens of this city built a huge outdoor theater that could hold 20,000 or more spectators. There were several other cultic temples in this impressive city, full of the worship of false gods. What kingdom did we talk about this past week? Actually there are two kingdoms: the good kingdom: the kingdom of God, and the bad or evil kingdom: the kingdom of Satan. Paul begins Ephesians in a grand way, speaking of the spiritual blessings for those who know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Followers of Christ have been:

*chosen by God to be holy and blameless; adopted as His children through Jesus Christ; redeemed through Christ’s blood; sins forgiven; God’s grace lavished on us; sealed by the Holy Spirit guaranteeing our inheritance; made alive when once we were dead; seated with Christ in the heavenly places; created in Christ to do good works; citizens of the kingdom of God; having God’s power at work within us; being gifted by God to accomplish His purposes; been given a new self; the power to live as children of light; new relationships with one another.

As I was driving to the office yesterday morning this song that is sung came over the radio: “To Not Worship You,” sung by Mercy Me. As I think of all these amazing truths that Paul shares, I was reminded of this song. I sat in my office singing along with it, with tears of gratefulness to God. Here are some of the words:

You're the one, You're the one

Who makes mountains move

Stars will not shine

Unless You tell them to, tell them to

Conquered the grave

To make all things new

So, who am I, who am I

To not worship You

Remind me who I am because of You

Tell me I'm not the man I once knew

'Cause I still feel so undeserving

What could You see in someone like me?

Holy, holy, You are God Almighty

Who was and is and will always be

Holy, holy, You are God Almighty

You are my song, You are my hope, my strength

As I read the first chapters of the book of Ephesians and am reminded of all that I am in Christ Jesus and what it cost Him, I must ask, “Who am I to not worship You?”

It is this backdrop that we have in coming to Ephesians 6 where the Apostle Paul speaks of the spiritual battle all followers of Jesus face against Satan and his army of wickedness. We go from the mountaintop of who we are in Jesus to the trenches of spiritual battle. It’s like a cold slap in the face. It’s like my reaction the first time I ran into the ocean water in Maine. The only ocean water I had been in during the summer prior to this was Cape Cod and Florida. It was August of our first year living there and I ran into the water and immediately came running out. A lady sitting on the beach said, “The water is warm today: it’s 54 degrees.” I’m thinking, “You’re out of your mind.” We are all the things the Apostle spoke of in the early chapters of Ephesians, but we are now in a spiritual battle. He speaks of the spiritual armor a follower of Jesus must put on to fight this spiritual battle. All week long we taught and sang about the pieces of spiritual armor. This morning I am going to talk about the first piece, *the belt of truth*, because we spoke all week of *absolute truth*.

I titled this message “*Forever and Always*,” because that is the description of absolute truth. It is truth that is for all people, at all times, in all locations. The absolute truth we are talking about this morning comes from, as we saw in Vacation Bible School, the book of Truth, the Bible. To get a picture of this I want us to read in unison Ephesians 6:10-18. Paul begins with two commands prior to describing the armor. As we read through this see if you can pick out the two commands.

Ephesians 6:10–18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 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.

Therefore put on the full armor 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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 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 saints.

The first command:

BE STRONG IN THE LORD

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

This command is in the present tense, telling us that we need to be continually strong. This is going to be a never-ending battle and we need to always be prepared. It will require strength, power, and endurance. The verb is also in the passive form which tells me this strength and might is not coming from me. Yet, we need to do what God instructs us to do.

Romans 4:20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength.

1 Timothy 1:12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service.

2 Timothy 2:1 You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 4:17 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth.

In Ephesians 1, Paul tells us of the power that is available to every believer.

Ephesians 1:18–21 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, **19** and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, **20** which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, **21** far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.

We have the same power available to us that it took to raise Jesus from the dead!!!

If you and I think we are going to win this battle on our own strength and power, we are gravely mistaken. We stand ZERO chance on our own!

So, the first command is to “be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power,” and the second command is:

PUT ON THE FULL ARMOR OF GOD

This is so important that he mentions this phrase twice! When you are putting on this armor make sure you don't miss a piece. It won't do you much good if you have a helmet without the breastplate or the shield without the helmet. Why is it so important that you have ALL the armor? It is because of the enemy we are facing. Let's review what Paul says about the enemy.

*he has a plan

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

*he is powerful

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.

Our battle is with the unseen realm. Many don't believe it even exists. It reminds me a bit of the war on terrorism. It is a difficult war to fight because you often cannot see the enemy and you don't know when they are going to strike, yet you need to be continually prepared.

Christians can take two extremes when it comes to the devil or Satan. The one extreme is that he has no power, and we just ignore the spiritual battle. The other extreme is that we see him under every rock, and we become consumed and fearful. Yes, he is powerful but as the Bible says the One who resides in the believer is greater.

1 John 4:4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

This isn't a power struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan. God is far greater and has already won the battle!

Colossians 2:13–15 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, **14** having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. **15** And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Sometimes I'll be watching a sporting event and somebody, usually from the opposing team, makes a great play and they begin to strut and flex. My first thought is, "You get paid to do that." Can you imagine doing that in any other profession? God has the ultimate victory and what is His symbol of victory over the enemy? It's the cross because it's empty!!!

*he is purposeful

Satan has an army of helpers

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.

Notice this is plural: rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, spiritual forces of evil. The battle is not against people but the battle is real!!

Yet, his power is limited.

A Mighty Fortress written by Martin Luther (Hymn #26)

For still our ancient foe

Doth seek to work us woe;

His craft and power are great,

And, armed with cruel hate,

On earth is not his equal.

The Prince of Darkness grim,

We tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure,

For lo, his doom is sure;

One little word shall fell him

So, the first command is to "be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power," and the second command is "put on the full armor of God," which leads us to the first piece of armor.

BELT OF TRUTH

Ephesians 6:14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

This verse also begins with a command: *stand firm*, with the truth buckled around your waist. In other translations we read "girded your waist with truth." Why does Paul start with this piece of armor? This is foundational to all the other pieces of armor. This is foundational in our culture. Paul is talking about absolute truth. Remember how we defined that in the beginning of this message: "That which is true for all people, at all times, in all locations."

During the times when this was written people wore long, loose garments, and this belt was usually made of leather, and was part of his undergarments. It gathered his tunic together and held his sword in place. This allowed him to move freely about and be more effective in battle. The belt may not have been visible, but it was absolutely essential. It wasn't just an accessory to the wardrobe.

We read much about truth in the Scriptures.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 8:32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

John 14:15–17 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. **16** And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— **17** the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

John 16:13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Pilate asks the question of the day:

John 18:38 “What is truth?” Pilate asked. With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.

There are many today who refuse to believe in any absolute truth. We hear phrases like, “my truth” or the need to be “true to myself.” Some will say if you can’t accept “my truth” than you hate me. We are being challenged to accept and champion everyone’s truth, and if we don’t we are “non-affirming.”

Truth is the first thing that we must put on. Without it we are completely lost. Without a source of truth that is beyond us we are absolutely lost and without hope. Without the absolute truth of the Scriptures, we are forced to depend on one another’s opinions, and we are all flawed. This governs my whole view of life: both for the here and now and for eternity. There is no way that we will be able to fight the spiritual battle without the truth of the Word of God. We fight an enemy who is described as a liar, a murderer, an accuser of believers, and an adversary.

Martyn Lloyd Jones, “Do we accept the Bible as the Word of God, as the sole authority in all matters of faith and practice, or do we not? Do I accept Scripture as a revelation from God, or do I trust in speculation, human knowledge, human understanding, and human reason? Is the Word of God, uniquely inspired and inerrant? No man in and of himself can ever arrive at a knowledge of God. How can mortal man arrive at a real knowledge of the immortal God, the God who says, “I am that I am,” the God who is from eternity to eternity, absolute in every respect, the God who is “light and in Him is no darkness at all?”

Luke describes the Apostle Paul’s interchange in Athens at the Areopagus, the philosophers of the day. Athens was a place where multiple gods were worshipped. Take note of what he said and what he didn’t say.

Acts 17:22–28 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. **23** For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. **24** “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. **25** And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. **26** From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. **27** God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. **28** ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

He confirmed that they were religious, but he didn’t say they were correct in their worship. He didn’t say, “You believe what you believe, and I’ll believe what I believe, and we’ll all end up in the same place. He didn’t say their belief system was equally valid and truthful compared to what he believed. They both couldn’t be true!!

Jesus himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6

Thank God we have been provided with the source of absolute truth!! We stand no chance against the enemy without this truth!!

SO WHAT???

*Have I come to accept this truth, giving my life to the God of truth?

*Have I realized that I need to know the truth to fight the devil and his helpers?

*Take some time to read and study the other pieces of spiritual armor in Ephesians 6

Breastplate of righteousness

Feet fitted with readiness from gospel of peace

Shield of faith

Helmet of salvation

Sword of the Spirit

*With whom am I sharing the truth (in word and action)?