

SPIRITUAL WARFARE [Part 1]

Luke 10:1-2

Ephesians 6:10-18 The Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor 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 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. 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.

Luke 10:1-20 Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-Two

¹⁰ After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. ² He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. ³ Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. ⁴ Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

⁵ "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' ⁶ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you.

⁷ Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

⁸ "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. ⁹ Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

¹⁰ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say,

¹¹ 'Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.' ¹² I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

¹³ "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴ But it will be more bearable for

Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵ And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

¹⁶ “Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.”

¹⁷ The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.”

¹⁸ He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹ I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰ However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

MESSAGE:

Stories about the war between good and evil have always fascinated people. From Hansel and Gretel to *Star Wars* to the novels of Stephen King, we love tales about good guys versus bad guys. St. George versus the dragon, Robin Hood versus the Sheriff of Nottingham, John Wayne versus every bad guy in the West. In recent years there has been a surge of interest in Christian novels about good versus evil: spiritual warfare. Ever since Frank Peretti published his *Left Behind* series, Christian novels have become popular. And while it's encouraging to see people become interested in spiritual issues, it's important to ask just how accurately these novels match up with what the Bible teaches about spiritual warfare. How much are they based on the Bible and how much comes out of the author's imagination?

In today's Gospel lesson we have Jesus' words on the subject of spiritual warfare, as he sends out his disciples, two by two, to spread the news that the Kingdom of God has arrived and that the final battle between Christ and Satan has begun.

It is traditional for a military commander to speak to his troops before sending them into battle in order to inspire them and urge them on to victory. This tradition is as old as warfare itself. Mark Anthony and Julius Caesar were said to be great orators on such occasions, as were Henry V of England and General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate Army. Maybe you saw the movie *Patton*, which begins with George C. Scott as Patton addressing his troops before a battle in WW2. In 1991, General “Stormin’ Norman Schwarzkopf urged his troops to be the “thunder and lightning” of the American forces about to invade Iraq. Probably the shortest oration to soldiers on record was given by Groucho Marx on behalf of the Queen of Fredonia in the movie *Duck Soup*, when he said, “*Alright you men, I want you all to go out there and fight for her honor—which is more than she's ever done!*” A more traditional oration to the soldiers might be Mel Gibson's pep talk to his band of Scottish warriors before they joined battle with Edward the First of England in the movie *Braveheart*. A rousing oration to the soldiers is intended to instill courage and loyalty so that they will inflict maximum damage on the enemy.

Jesus, however, takes a completely different tack.

Normally a commander would send his troops into combat with full battle gear. Jesus, however, tells his disciples to “take neither purse nor bag nor sandals” with them. He sends them out without sword or shield or even shoes. A normal commander would assure his soldiers that they were stronger and fiercer than their enemies, but Jesus says to his troops: “I am sending you out like lambs among wolves”—a statement hardly designed to build their confidence. Sometimes warriors scream a battle cry as they rush into battle—like the terrifying “rebel yell” of the Confederate soldiers as they charged Yankee lines. But Jesus commands his soldiers to speak words of peace. Regular troops receive “battle pay” for their service and are given food and medical rations; Jesus instructs his disciples to depend upon the charity of others for their sustenance. There will not even be time for R&R he tells them: *“Do not greet anyone along the road.”*

Strange instructions! Jesus sends his troops into battle without weapons, armor, shoes, provisions or pay. And instead of giving them territory to conquer, he gives them a message to proclaim: *“The Kingdom God is near.”* But the stakes riding on whether or not that message gets delivered are the greatest in the history of warfare because whoever does not hear and believe that message will be worse off on judgment day than the people of Sodom who were scorched to death by fire raining down from the sky. To reject Jesus’ message is to reject Jesus; to reject Jesus is to reject God; to reject God is to declare yourself His enemy and be left with only *“...a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”* Let’s be clear: the alternative to receiving peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ is to be cast into a lake of fire and sulphur with the devil and all his angels. That is the message the church is authorized and commissioned to proclaim: receive peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ or fall under His wrath and judgment.

So our mission and message are clear. But how are we to recognize our enemy? Jesus doesn’t spend any time at all describing Satan and his legions. The only words he utters about Satan have to do with his defeat. And that has left the field open for speculation. Paul has told us that Satan doesn’t show his true colors, but appears to us disguised as “an angel of light.” So how will we know him when we see him?

In most spiritual warfare novels and movies, Satan and his demons are portrayed as terrifying creatures who inflict suffering and death upon those who get in their way. Ordinary Christians don’t stand a chance against them. Even priests and pastors are no match for them—a spiritual specialist like an exorcist or shaman has to be brought in to handle them, which he usually does with some kind of arcane spiritual abracadabra. Sometimes even the specialist himself is destroyed in the process. From all this you might gain the impression that ordinary Christians like you and me are no match for these creatures from hell. But the truth is that believers have nothing to worry about when it comes to Satan and his demons. Jesus pronounces the final verdict upon Satan after his seventy-two disciples return from their evangelistic journey, rejoicing and saying, *“Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!”* Jesus replies, *“I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”* Do you realize what this means? It means that whenever Christ is proclaimed and people hear and believe, **Satan is cast out**. Wherever peace with God through Jesus Christ enters a human heart, Satan is dethroned. He can no

longer accuse us of our sins before the throne of God, as he did Job, because **when Satan is cast out of our hearts he is cast out of heaven!** His lies cannot deceive those who know the truth of the Gospel—that God has forgiven all their sins for Jesus’ sake. Satan is silenced forever by God’s divine forgetfulness. Far from being the powerful supervillain he is portrayed as being in the imagination of moviemakers and novelists, Satan is absolutely helpless in the face of Christian faith. No exorcist or shaman is required to overcome his power—merely belief in the Gospel. Jesus says to his disciples: *“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.”* “Nothing will harm you!” You have come to Mt. Zion, the city of God, surrounded by walls of faith which are impervious to anything the enemy can hurl against them. As John Newton wrote in his hymn, *“Glorious things of thee are spoken—Zion, city of our God: He whose word cannot be broken, formed thee for His own abode; On the Rock of Ages founded—what can shake thy sure repose? By salvation’s walls surrounded; Thou mayest smile at all thy foes!”*

Then Jesus adds, *“Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”* In other words: I sent you out as lambs among wolves without shield or weapon or food or money so that you would learn that your power does not come from yourselves, but from me. So do not rejoice in what you have done, but in the eternal life you have received—and never forget where that life and power come from.

Several years ago I traveled to Israel with my family and some members of the congregation I was serving. One of the places we visited was Capernaum, Peter’s home town on the north coast of the Sea of Galilee. As our tour bus was coming over a hill near Capernaum I noticed a number of large, blackened rocks that were strewn down the hillside. I asked our tour guide what they were, and he said that they were the remains of Korazin. And I thought of Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel lesson: *“Woe to you Korazin! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed at Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you.”* This once proud city had been reduced to rubble, never to be rebuilt—just as Jesus had said it would be.

“The Scriptures cannot be broken.” God’s powerful Word, which split the primeval darkness with divine light and created all that exists, **governs** all that exists as well. That same Word has overcome the power of Satan by forgiving our sins and giving us peace with God and eternal life. That same Word tells us that there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved than the Name of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. The seventy-two disciples went out in power of His Name and returned rejoicing. The citizens of Korazin rejected His Name and sentenced themselves to everlasting destruction. That, in its simplest form, is the choice every human being has to make. Jesus asks: “Who do YOU say that I am?” How will you respond?

Amen.