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Fall 2023

Staying True in a World Far From God

Sermon Title: The Church's Call to Arms

To be used with Session 6: Prepare for Battle

Scripture: Ephesians 6:10-13

Connection with Bible Study: To complement the Bible study "Speak Truth Boldly," this sermon will build upon the study's main point that God strengthens us as we pray and engage in spiritual battle.

Introduction: Every year, our country commemorates D-Day. On June 6, 1944, Allied troops landed on the coast of Normandy in France. It was not the end of World War II, but many people saw it as the beginning of the end of the war in Europe. One man who shared that opinion was Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. He was in charge of the German defenses at Normandy, and he was determined to drive the Allies away from the beaches. He knew if they gained any kind of foothold in France, the war would be as good as over. When the Allies succeeded in taking the beaches, Rommel knew it was only a matter of time until Germany was defeated. He tried to talk Hitler into pursuing peace terms with the Allies, but Hitler refused.

Chuck Colson said the death and resurrection of Jesus was God's spiritual D-Day. It was not the end of our spiritual warfare, but it was the beginning of the end. When Jesus died on the cross, He struck a fatal blow to Satan's kingdom. Three days later, Jesus struck another blow to the kingdom of darkness when He came out of the tomb. One day Jesus is coming again, and He will destroy the last remnants of Satan's kingdom. Until that day comes, you and I will be engaged in a spiritual battle. Our Lord never promised us an easy life in this world. In fact, He promised quite the opposite. He said, "You will have suffering in this world. Be courageous! I have conquered the world." In other words, our Lord will prevail.

1. The reality of this conflict (Eph. 6:10-11).

a. Paul knew as well as anyone that the struggle was real (v. 10).

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, and in the Greek language, this verse is in the passive voice. If you try to stand against the devil in your own strength, you'll lose every time. However, if you have trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, God has put His Holy Spirit in you. The devil is more than a match for you, but he is no match for the power of Almighty God. If God's Holy Spirit lives in you, then His power is at your disposal, so you have no reason for not standing strong.

b. Instead of standing strong, many churches are knuckling under.

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People say society changes, so we have to change with it. Now that may be true to some extent, but the Word of God never changes. If society tells you one thing, and the Word of God tells you something else, then you go with what God says. If you take a biblical stand on practically anything these days, and you're likely to get criticized. Worse yet, much of the criticism will come from people who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ. Do you remember when the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage? Churches all over the country should have wept over that decision. Instead, many of them celebrated it! A few years have passed since the decision, and we've seen the rise of more and more perversion. Predictably, the churches that went along with same-sex marriage are also going along with the newer perversions.

c. We must put on the whole armor of God (v. 11).

Paul said we are to this armor so we can "stand against the schemes of the devil." The word translated "schemes" is the Greek word *methodeia*, from which we get the words "method" and "methodology." In this case, it refers to scheming, craftiness, or deceit. We can't deny that the devil is a very clever foe, and if you try to outsmart him, you'll fail every time. Many churches today are falling prey to the devil's schemes because they've failed to use the armor God has provided. The same goes for individual Christians.

2. The reason for this conflict (Eph. 6:12).

a. Our enemies are not physical, but they are nonetheless real.

We must remember that people are not our enemies. Many of them have fallen prey to our enemies' deception, and they may unwittingly work for our enemies, but the people themselves are not our enemies. Bible scholars disagree over Paul's exact meaning in this verse. Some believe he was talking about different levels of demonic powers. Others believe he was talking about their various spheres of influence. Personally, I agree with those who think Paul used all these different terms for emphasis. His point was our spiritual enemies are both numerous and powerful.

b. We must be balanced in our understanding of Satan and his demons.

When it comes to demonic powers, people tend to go to one of two extremes. One extreme is to take them too lightly. Many people today laugh at the very idea of Satan and his demons. They say such things are the product of ancient and medieval superstition. That's ironic because they've bought into one of the devil's biggest lies. He likes it when people think he doesn't exist, because that inevitably gives him more freedom to operate. Others take him too seriously. These enemies are supernatural, but they are no match for Almighty God. If you've trusted in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then Satan has no power over you. Keep your eyes on Jesus and let Him take care of the devil.

3. Our readiness for this conflict (Eph. 6:13).

a. Paul commanded us to take up the whole armor of God.

When Paul spoke of “the evil day,” he probably wasn’t thinking about any particular day. He just meant we live in a world filled with evil, and we need to be prepared to face it. False religions and immorality abound in our society, so that’s all the more reason for us to take up the armor of God. No Roman soldier ever left behind any piece of his armor. To do so would make himself vulnerable in some areas. Likewise, when you leave off any part of your spiritual armor, you make yourself vulnerable to Satan and his schemes.

b. What did Paul mean when he said, “having prepared everything, to take your stand”?

In Paul’s day, when a battle was over, the only soldiers still standing were the ones who prevailed. The soldiers lying on the ground were either dead or wounded. The victorious soldiers were the ones who were still standing. If you think you can win these spiritual battles with your own strength and ingenuity, you are kidding yourself. The devil is too powerful and too smart for you to beat him in your own strength. Yet when you stand in the strength of God and use the armor He has provided, you will prevail every time. I’m not saying the struggle will always be easy. There will be times when you’ll get discouraged and feel like giving up. Yet if you keep your eyes on the Lord and trust Him to give you the strength you need, you’ll prevail in the end.

c. Many Christians have become spiritual casualties.

I’ve been a pastor a long time—long enough to hear plenty of stories about pastors who fell by the wayside because of moral failure. Some of them were personal friends of mine—godly men who I admired and respected. They knew better, but they failed to take up the armor of God. There are many people in the pews who have also ruined their testimonies through moral and spiritual compromise. Don’t think it can’t happen to you. If you start thinking you’re too strong or too spiritual to be tempted in certain areas, chances are the devil has you right where he wants you.

Conclusion: One of the great heroes of World War II was General Anthony McAuliffe. He was the commander of the 101st Airborne Division, and in December of 1944, he and his division were pinned down in the Belgian city of Bastogne during the famous Battle of the Bulge. On December 20, he received a written message from the German commander. He looked at it, and then he said, “Aw, nuts!” He read the message out loud to his staff, and it was a surrender demand. The men didn’t say anything, and General McAuliffe said, “I don’t know what to tell them.” One of his officers said, “Well, General, I think your first remark would be hard to beat.” It took the general a few seconds to realize what he meant, but then he grinned and said, “Okay, I’ll do it!” Thus, he sent back his now-famous reply: “To the German commander: Nuts!” General George Patton was ordered to take his army to Bastogne to lend a hand. When he heard what General McAuliffe had done, he redoubled his efforts. He said, “Any man who is that eloquent deserves to be rescued!”

General McAuliffe was fighting a physical war, but we are fighting a spiritual war. Sometimes it gets discouraging, and the odds seem to be overwhelmingly against us. Sometimes we’re

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tempted to wonder if the fight is really worth it. We must remember that our Lord promised us the final victory. We may lose battles in the short term, but there is no question concerning the final outcome. Thus, surrender is not an option for us, and neither is retreat. Put on the armor of God and trust Him to give you the strength you need. Then stand up and fight back, knowing that our Lord has guaranteed us the final victory.

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