**Ephesians 6:10-20 Be Strong in the Lord**

Let me start with a question. What is it about the world today that gives you most cause for concern? (Feedback)

My concerns?…the plight of the multitudes of refugees who just want somewhere to feel safe. Terrorism, the drug ‘ice’ that is widely available to youth in Narooma & Bodalla, the 13.5% unemployment rate amongst youth.

Many of these problems are of our own making. They are a result of the fallen condition of a world that has turned its back on its creator. But there are also spiritual forces at work behind the evils that surround us.

Listen to what Paul has to say, from our reading in Ephesians 6. “For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Behind every corrupt government, every abuse of power, every expression of greed, every act of terrorism or domestic violence, these unseen forces rub their hands together in glee.

I don’t believe these unseen forces necessarily cause or orchestrate the evil that surrounds us. We are neither puppets of Satan, nor of God. We are responsible for our own choices and the ugly consequences of our sin are our own doing – but I do believe that the spiritual forces of evil are a powerful encouragement to humanity’s predisposition towards sin. And as governments, corporations and individuals become obsessed with the allure of money and power and self-indulgence, these spiritual forces have increasingly more influence.

**And so, says Paul, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power!**

The minute we take on the mantle of the Kingdom of God, we enter a battleground. We face our opponents on two fronts – personal and communal.

On the personal front, we do battle every time we resist temptation and seek to shine with the light of Christ; on a communal front, we align ourselves with the Church of Jesus Christ and do battle as a body, as a Christian community, against the forces of evil in the world. Or at least we should. It’s surprisingly easy to forget that we are in the midst of a spiritual battle.

If a Christian, or even a church, becomes more occupied with earthly concerns than kingdom concerns, there can actually be little evidence of any conflict. As you would expect, the enemy doesn’t really have to worry about those who aren’t much of a threat.

It’s the people of God on the front line – those of us who are aware of the fight, and who nonetheless seek to live the life we are truly called to – who experience the battle.

Yet we are so puny in comparison to the might of these forces. How can we possibly hope to be victorious against what Paul calls the “the cosmic powers of this present darkness”? Talk about scary!

**Here’s the good news. We are able to conquer the enemy, not in our own strength, but through the strength and power of Jesus Christ**

In the first 2 chapters of Ephesians, Paul encourages his readers to realise just who they are, and what they have in Christ. In 1:19 Paul prays that his readers will know “God’s incomparably great power for those who believe; power like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead.”

Paul then goes on to say that we are dealing with an already defeated foe – that “God placed all things under (Christ’s) feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the Church, which is his body…”

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul reminds his readers that: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

We are dealing with an already defeated foe. The battle was won on the cross. As Christ’s followers we are his regents to both declare and enforce his victory over evil. But while we remain on this earth, there will still be skirmishes - a bit like after the 2nd World War when hostilities continued, even though the outcome of the war had been determined. In the midst of a skirmish, we can at times feel a little overwhelmed, can’t we?

Picture if you will, the largest truck or semi-trailer you have ever seen. Then think of a traffic officer. A huge eighteen wheeler truck has enormous strength! Its driver has real power at his disposal. A traffic officer on the other hand does not have the physical power to stop a truck, but he does have delegated authority at his disposal. When the traffic officer puts up his hand and the truck driver stops his vehicle, it’s because behind that gesture rests the whole weight of the Police Force.

When dealing with the might of the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil, we have the weight and power of the cross and the resurrection behind us. This is why Peter was able to say in his letter, “resist the devil and he will flee from you”. This is why Paul was able to say, “I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.” As we stand firm and resist evil, we do so with the power of the risen Christ, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, at our back.

But in the midst of the battle, we often need encouragement. So, to help us engage our faith and stand strong in the Lord, Paul gives us a graphic metaphor, inspired no doubt by the Roman soldiers that patrolled his prison, and also from the imagery of the Messiah, found in Isaiah.

**To be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, Paul says we must put on the whole armor of God** (Eph\_6:10-11).

How do we ‘put on’ this armour? We do it through faith. As we envisage and recall each piece of armour, we are reminded of our defensive protection in Christ, as well as our offensive weapons.

**We are protected by:**

**the Belt of Truth** – Interesting fact: A soldiers belt not only held his tunic together, it gave him somewhere to hang his sword. The truth that Jesus Christ is Lord, seated at the right hand of God, who died and rose again to make us his own….not only is the belief which holds his church together, but is the truth we wield as a sword as we share the Good news of Jesus.

**the Breastplate of Righteousness.** Interesting fact: The breastplate covered only the front of the Roman soldier. If he ran away, his back was not protected. One of the enemy’s tactics to bring Christians down is to condemn them, or encourage them to condemn themselves. We can stand firm against accusation because we are protected from condemnation and death by Christ’s own righteousness, which becomes ours when we repent & put our trust in him.

On our feet, like shoes, is the **readiness to announce the Good News.** Shoes protect the feet**,** and so enable us to be ready to go anywhere, anytime. In the same way our desire to share the Good news of Jesus should always at the ready. Nothing cramps the evil one’s style like a Christian sharing the Good News about Jesus.

**the Shield of Faith:** Interesting fact**:** In Roman times, shields were made of wood which would burn, so they encased them in leather which was saturated with water prior to battle. The wet leather would put out flaming darts. Being shot at is inevitable for the faithful Christian. As we stand firm, our faith in Jesus and his goodness can put out the destructive fire of the enemy’s arrows.

**the Helmet of Salvation.** Interesting fact – the Roman helmet not only offered protection, but was a proud symbol of their military victories. Our salvation – the fact that we are forgiven, set free from sin and reinstated as God’s children – is our ultimate protection, and our badge of victory!

I have a friend who wrote a really good children’s song some years ago. It’s called “my dad’s bigger than your dad!” It was a song written from the perspective of two lads bragging about their dads, but one dad was our heavenly father, who of course won the contest. When we are ‘saved’ and become a child of God, we have a dad who is stronger than anything the evil one and his minions can throw at us.

**Our powerful offensive weapon is the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.** When you hear that expression, “the Word of God”, what’s the first thing we think of? -The Bible, right? But remember John 1:1: “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” The Word, or logos – is Jesus himself. Jesus is our sword.

Then finally, as we move away from the armour, we find Paul’s final means of protection – prayer.

Paul says in v 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 the saints.”

Paul was saying, “it doesn’t matter when you pray, how you pray, or what you pray, - just PRAY.” The only rule about prayer in this passage is “pray in the Spirit” – which simply means to pray from our position as a child of God, with our hearts turned to him, and trusting in him.

Sometimes we can be drawn into thinking that the specific words we use, or the approach we take, or the posture we adopt in prayer, can make or break a prayer request. Don’t ever think that because God does not appear to have answered a prayer, or because we might have lost a particular spiritual skirmish, that it was because of the way we prayed about it. **The fact that** **we prayed about it** is what counts.

A really important part of praying in regard to protection is that we “pray for the saints” The saints are our brothers & sisters in Christ. The fact that Paul exhorted his readers to pray for each other is an indication just how powerful it is.

From here we move into another week. It will be a week filled with spiritual challenges trials, & skirmishes. Let’s remember that we fight from a position of victory. Lets remember that at the Name of Jesus, every knee will bow; let’s arm ourselves to the teeth, and remember to pray for each other. Let’s go get ‘em.