



Sermon – May 31, 2020
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Ephesians 6:10 – 11

Joshua 1:9

Romans 4:20 – 21

Acts 9:22

Ephesians 4:22 - 24

As you grab your seat, let's grab our Bibles together. We're going to spend our time this morning in Ephesians chapter 6, picking up in verse 10. If you'll remember as we're moving through this series in Ephesians the last couple weeks, we've been thinking about how the kingdom applies to our work. And now what Paul is going to do in the last main section of this book is talk through how the kingdom is at war. And so if you'll follow along with me, beginning in verse 10, here's what the Apostle Paul has to tell us.

[¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.](#)

There's a man by the name of Captain Tom Moore who served as a British World War II army member. And he was active in battle in both India and in Myanmar. And 75 years later as he was about to reach his 100th birthday, just a month ago he was knighted by the Queen. And there was much fanfare about Captain Tom Moore throughout the country. He was celebrated for his heroic valor and I couldn't help but be captured by one of the ways that people described the affect it had on the nation because of the encouragement he brought to the country in the midst of the hardship of Coronavirus. One person said this about Captain Tom Moore. They said, "There's nothing self-centered or grandiose about Captain Tom. He's just a wonderful man. He brings a little bit of good news and light into what are very difficult times. A soldier who brings good news and light." Isn't that the type of picture that Paul is laying out for us here in Ephesians 6 when he speaks of how we as believers are to take up the whole armor of God? Now perhaps this is a familiar passage to you. One in which you've come across time and time again in the Scripture. But let's remember what's happening here in the text. When Paul comes to this point, he is giving the church in Ephesus a final call to action. How they need to come together as a body and to work for the sake of the kingdom in the spiritual warfare that Paul has reminded them that they are called to. And think about what's happening. Paul has spent his

entire time working through this theological book. Laying gospel foundations for how we are to live. And now that he comes to the end of this letter, he reminds us of the challenges we might face as we seek to follow God's design for our life in the kingdom. And so I want you to notice here that as we work through this text, Paul was going to lay out for us three keys for what it looks like to fight the good fight of the faith in the Christian life. And I want you to notice the first one right there at the start of verse 10 when he says;

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.

The first key to fighting the good fight of the faith that Paul shows us here is that we need to find strength in the gospel which is the power of God. You see the way he talks about it there? He begins this phrase by saying the word finally. Now this isn't some add on that's unrelated to everything else. Instead this is a crescendo. It's a culmination. The entire letter has been repointing right to this moment. Paul wraps it all together. It's almost like he is a general standing before the army before he sends them off into battle. And he's speaks there of this command to be strong in the Lord. Now in the original language it's a verb that is passive in nature. In other words, not that you bring your own strength, but you are drawing strength from another. In other words, be strengthened. Find your strength in the Lord. And this instruction isn't unique. In fact, we see this command to be strong in the Lord, this call to be strong in the Lord, all over the Bible. And if we had more time this morning, I could take you verse after verse after verse of examples of that. And if you're capturing notes, I just want you to write a few references down as we fly by them. And if perhaps you aren't capturing notes this morning, whether you're here in person or online, maybe this is a challenge to you that you can pick up a journal this week and bring it with you next Sunday when we start to gather together again. As I was setting up my office here this week, I happened to come across a few old journals that I had when I was a student here at A&M and in Central. I could look back at notes I took from sermons that Chris preached. And I could remember those moments, even these 15 years later. And maybe the Lord can do that at work in you. But as you're capturing that in your notes or on your phone as we go through this fly by, I want you to notice the way that the theme of being strong in the Lord shows up over and over again in Scripture. So think back to Joshua 1:9. You remember what happens there? As Israel is getting ready to cross into the promised land, God gives them a word and in Joshua 1:9 he says there to them:

⁹Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.

There's a promise of victory and a promise of God's presence in the midst of the battle that is the source of strength. And just as that's true for Israel, when they are entering in to face the enemies in the promised land, that's true for you and I today. Or think about the way the Apostle Paul talks about Abraham in Romans chapter 4, verses 20 and 21. He commends him for where he finds his strength. He says this about Abraham.

²⁰No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised.

Abraham's strength even in the midst of the uncertainties of his calling came because he knew he followed a God he could believe in. Promises that he could trust provided an anchor for his soul in the midst of life's battles. But Paul doesn't just talk about the way that God has strengthened others in the Old Testament. Listen to the way that Luke speaks about Paul himself being strengthened in Acts 9, verse 22. Where Paul, where Luke writes about how Paul experienced being strong in the Lord. He says this about him when he was still Saul. It says this:

[22But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.](#)

So what happens? God strengthens Paul for the calling He has placed on his life. And through the strength of the Lord, what does he do? He confounds the Jews. He argues and persuades for the sake of the kingdom. He carries out the Lord's mission by the Lord's strength. Unless we wonder where that strength should come from, you can flip back just one page in your book of Ephesians. So Ephesians 3 where Paul speaks of where that power comes from. And that it comes from the gospel. And that prayer that he begins in Ephesians 3, look down at verse 16. And what he says there is that according to the riches of His glory, may He grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being. God calls us to a battle He equips us to win. He grants us strength to achieve the victory that has already been won for us in Christ. There is this recurring theme about a need for strength in the Lord. But the challenge we face in the Christian life is that we don't always depend on the Lord's strength. So if you were to go back over a century ago to 1900, the coastal town of Galveston, Texas faced the worst natural disaster in the history of the United States. A massive hurricane came and crushed that city and they were overwhelmed. The largest loss of life by any natural disaster in the history of the country. And if you look back at why that happened, one of the reasons is because there was no expectation of a storm. They thought that they were going to be safe. That Galveston was an indestructible city. That even if a bad storm came, that they'd be just fine. And there was no initiative to protect them because they didn't think that the storm was coming their way. They'd heard reports near Florida and they thought that it was going to turn east and that they would not be facing any issue. And as a result of that, there was no preparation that happened. They didn't take any measures to flee the city or find higher ground or stable footing. And as a result of that, when the storm came, they were destroyed. And I just can't help but wonder if we, outside of Christ, face that same danger. So often we can think when the storms of life come, we just don't see them coming. We don't expect them. That won't ever happen to me. Well we don't prepare for them in advance. That's going to be somebody else. I don't need to worry about that. Or we have no protection. We think we can just do it on our own. But what Paul is reminding us of here this morning is that the strength for the battle comes from the Lord. That we should seek to find our strength in God. And if you look back at verse 10 there in chapter 6, he doesn't just say, "Be strong in the Lord." Look how it goes on. In the strength of His might. So in the span on that one phrase, Paul is using three different words in the original language that speak about the power, the might, and the strength of God. And so the question before us is, how powerful is the strength of His might? Well look back with me again a little bit earlier in Ephesians to chapter 1 in verse 19. And we're going to see these exact same three words in Ephesians 1:19 through 21 used. Where we can know exactly how powerful God is. Here's what it says"

¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,

Paul uses those same three words as here in chapter 6 in verse 10 to speak of the power of God. It's a power that is so great it can defeat death. It is a power that is so mighty it can conquer the grave which means for us this morning, Central family, that no matter what we are facing, the power of God is enough to sustain us in the battle of life. See Paul is warning us about two twin mistakes that we can make in the Christian life. One of self-reliance; that we can think that the battle we are called to can be fought on our own strength. Or perhaps on the other end of the spectrum, one of self-defiance. Where we think we can bring nothing to the table, that we're helpless. And so there can be this tendency to think, "I've got this." Or, "There's no hope." But instead in the midst of the strife that we face in our spiritual lives, Paul is telling us that Jesus is enough. That the power of God that comes in the gospel can be our strength in the middle of the battle.

But I want you to notice, Paul doesn't just stop there. He goes on in the text to lay out a second key to fighting the good fight of the faith. And it's right there at the beginning of verse 11 when he says,

Put on the whole armor of God.

So the second thing we must do is put on Christ who is the armor of God. He speaks there of putting on; an idea of dressing up or gearing up. This soldier who is headed into battle will put on all these pieces that we will talk about in the weeks ahead to ready themselves to enter the fray. And he talks there about putting on the whole armor of God. In the original language, it's a word that is used to signify a complete collection, a full set, everything that you need for the moment is there. And this wouldn't have just been an image that Paul was pondering from days past when he had seen Roman soldiers. Remember what's happening here. Paul is writing this letter to Ephesus from a Roman prison. He doesn't need to think about Roman soldiers he's seen in the past. He can probably look right outside the jail cell and see every piece of that armor that he writes about. And as he's writing this letter in chains, speaking of the way that through chains, God has brought freedom in Christ if we seek to put on this armor. He is reminding them that the battle that we are called to is one in which God fights on our behalf. Now I remember when I first became engrossed by the armor of God back in college when I was a student here at A&M. There was a season of my life in which I would try every day when I woke up, before I rose out of bed, I would go through a mental checklist in my mind. And picture putting on the armor of God before I entered into the day as if it was some mystical ritual that if I followed it, maybe God would grant me better victory than if I didn't. And that's not the picture that Paul is laying out for us here. He's not calling us to a mystical ritual that must happen each day. Instead, he is calling us to embrace a relationship with Jesus. Because what we need to be asking ourselves is, "What does Paul mean when he says, put on the full armor of God?" Well we can find that answer right back in Ephesians chapter 4. If you look back at verses 22 through 24, Paul will give us the answer of what it means to put on the full armor of God. Here's what he says.

²²put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, ²³and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, ²⁴and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Paul draws this contrast between putting off the old self and putting on the new self. And we know from his writings this is the way that Paul speaks repeatedly in his letters. And sometimes he talks about it in the past tense. About the fact that when we are here united to Christ by faith, what God does is He fully enables us to put off the old self, to leave behind the old man, and to put on the new self. And to live as a new creation as Paul speaks about elsewhere. But at the same time we see language just like this in Ephesians 4 where we should continue to put off the old self and to put on the new self. And how does that relate to putting on the full armor of God? Well here's the picture. What Paul is showing us here in this moment is that when we are to put on the full armor of God, what he's telling us is to put on Christ who is the armor of God. That's the picture. That these pieces of the armor that we are to put on are first true about Jesus before they are ever true about you and me in Christ. So to put on Christ is to put on the new self in the way that he talks about in Ephesians chapter 4. And maybe we can put this into context by remembering what happened yesterday. So yesterday was the SpaceX launch. For the first time since 2011 we've had an American spacecraft send American astronauts to the International Space Station. And there was all sorts of hype built up to it. Elon Musk and SpaceX the first time to have a private rocket that would launch Americans into space. But one of the things that got a lot of attention in the lead up to the time were the new space suits that the Astronauts were wearing. They looked a little bit sleeker. And there's a reason for that. They were designed, they were created by a Hollywood movie costume designer. They were crafted to meet NASA specifications. And then once those astronauts entered into the vessel, they were connected to it so that in a sense, they were linked together and became a part of something greater than themselves in order to accomplish the mission. Well isn't that the picture that Paul is laying out for us here in the armor of God? It is something we couldn't create. It was crafted to meet the exacting standards of the holiness of God and when God rescues us and we are united to Christ by faith and we put on the armor of God, you know what happens? We are connected into something greater than ourselves. We are united together as one church. Sent on that mission to live in the way that God intends us to live. Paul says, "Put on Christ who is the armor of God." And that's the way that he is picturing there an idea that is seen all throughout the New Testament of our union with Christ and salvation. You know what happens in salvation? That in that moment that God rescues you from sin, do you know what He does? He takes your sin and He puts it on Christ. And He takes Christ's righteousness and He puts it on you. You are united together by faith. You become one flesh. And as a result of that, here's what's happened. Here is the glorious truth of union with Christ that comes in salvation. In that moment and from that point forward, God no longer sees you as a sinner. He sees you through the eyes of a Savior. He no longer looks at you and sees you as a failure. He sees you as forgiven. He no longer sees you as a slave to sin; He sees you as a son or daughter of the resurrected King. And if we want to walk by faith in the battle that God has called us to, what Paul is laying out for us here is that we must put on Christ who is the armor of God. And I want you to notice the way that this section of the verses ends in verse 11. Because Paul is going to give us one more key to fighting the good fight of the faith right there at the end of verse 11. He's going to say that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

So the third thing that Paul is calling us to here this morning is to resist satan who is the enemy of God. So why do we need to put on the armor of God as verse 11 tells us to do? We see it right here at the end of verse 11. That we may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. And let's not forget who the devil is. The devil is a fallen angel. A personal being who was created for God's glory from the very beginning, but rebelled against God's kingdom and seeks to rule over this corrupt world. He is a serpent in the garden. He's a dragon in Revelation. But Paul speaks of him here in Ephesians 2 as the prince of the power of the air. He is ruling over this fallen kingdom in this time and what Paul is reminding us of this morning is that satan is at war with each one of us. And the challenge before us is to resist him. To stand against his schemes. And the danger for each one of us is so often we can live our lives in a way where we forget satan even exists. We lose sight of the fact that he is always seeking to lead us astray. But Paul gives us a different picture here. He speaks of the schemes of the devil. He uses this elsewhere in Ephesians in chapter 4, verse 14. To talk about the schemes, the ways, the roadmaps, the pathways that he seeks to lead us astray. They are dangerous roads that he tries to draw us on. And what we know from Scripture, is that satan has two primary schemes that he seeks to use in every person's life. And the first one we see right from the beginning back in Genesis chapter 3 in verse 6 is satan schemes against us through deception. Do you remember what happened in the garden? Adam and Eve are created. They are called to multiply, to be God's king and queen on the earth, to bring it into, under their dominion in a way that establishes God's kingdom. And then the serpent shows up. He begins to tempt Eve. And do you remember how he does it in Genesis chapter 3 in verse 6? What he does is he appeals to her appetites in verse 6. Speaks about how she looked at the fruit and she saw that it was a delight to the eyes, that it was good for food, that it was desirable to make one wise. In other words, it appealed to her senses, to her desires, those God-given things that could find their expression in good ways. Satan uses those from the very beginning, he takes good desires and seeks to convince us to satisfy them through forbidden fruit. And that's one of the schemes that Paul is speaking of here. That of deception. That satan is constantly drawing us into sin. I was reminded of that last weekend, the day before I came to preach this past Sunday, I started to get calls and e-mails from people in the church saying, "Hey, I got an e-mail saying you need some help. If you really need some help, I'm happy to do it. But it was a little strange the way that you asked for it." Well it turned out somebody had made a fake e-mail account with my name on it and was e-mailing people in the church saying, "Hey, can you help me out with something?" If they were to reply back and say, "Sure, what do you need?" They said, "Can you go to the store and buy some E-Bay gift cards, scratch off the information, take a picture of it, and send it back to me?" Now you don't have to ever wonder if that's me. Because I'm not asking for E-Bay gift cards. If I'm calling in a favor, I'm going to ask for like Mexican food or barbeque gift cards or something like that. No, I'm not going to ever ask you for gift cards by e-mail. But what happened? They use deception. They tricked the people. They pulled on the heartstrings of a desire to help a new pastor out in order to seek to lead them astray. What Paul is warning us here is that satan is doing the exact same things. And I remember reading not too long ago in a book about a study that was done on e-mail scams. And you know the ones you've gotten over the years are like from Nigerian princes or other things that when you read it you know are totally bogus. And you probably have wondered, "Why do they do something this bad. Do they think this is actually going to work?" Well the reason is because e-mail scammers are trying to weed out the vigilant so they can find the vulnerable. They don't want to waste time with somebody who might see through them eventually. They want to know do they have somebody they can sucker from the very beginning. But guess what. That's the same way satan

works. In your life, he's going to try all sorts of things to lead you astray. He's testing you. He's seeing how do you react. What do you do? Is that appealing? And some of them, you're going to be vigilant for and they're not going to work. And he's going to move quickly on from that.

But you know in your life there are besetting sins you're vulnerable to. And he's going to identify those. He's going to seek to exploit them. He's going to cultivate them in order to lead you towards sin. Paul is saying, "We must put on the armor of God which is Christ in order to stand against satan's scheme of deception." But I also want you to understand the other aspect of satan's schemes. Because he doesn't just use deception. Afterwards he uses accusation. So remember the way that John writes about the devil in Revelation 12 in verse 10. He refers to the devil as the accuser of our brothers who has been thrown down. Who accuses them day and night before God. So how does satan work? Satan deceives us with seduction. And then after we sin, he destroys us with shame. That's the pattern. Deception then accusation. That happens over and over again in the Scripture and over and over again in our own lives. And so I've got a friend that talks about how there's no one more pro-choice heading into the abortion clinic than the devil. But after that woman takes an innocent life, there's no one more pro-life than the devil as he condemns her for what she did wrong. He stands and accuses her for her actions. And that's not just true for that decision of an abortion-minded woman and that difficult moment in her life. That's true for every one of us in Christ. That satan is seeking to lead us into sin through deception and to come behind that and to destroy us through our shame, through the sense of judgment and guilt that we feel there. And one of the things you ought to be wrestling with yourself is how do we know the difference between satan's accusation and the Spirit's conviction? Well when Paul is speaking of the schemes of the devil here, what he is laying out is that when satan accuses us, what happens is it, it brings about a shame that leads to a retreat from God. But instead, when the Spirit convicts us, we see the New Testament talking elsewhere about it, leading us to a sorrow that brings us to repentance before God. Both have that element of sorrow or shame, but one leads us away from God, the other one leads us back to Him. And Paul is warning us of why we must put on the armor of God. Because Satan is working even now to develop a customized plan to destroy your life.

I saw this week that we're 100 days away from College Football. Anybody else excited about that? OK. Now you know, even in this moment when teams can't practice, when fields are shut down, where they can't be in the weight room, there are coaches even now that are working on a customized game plan for the enemies that they'll face on the field later on. They're working on how to exploit their weaknesses on offense or defense. They're developing plans so that when they can get on the field with them in that moment, they can exploit the weaknesses and take advantages of those opportunities in order to seek to defeat their enemy. And what I want you to hear from Paul this morning is he's warning us that satan is doing the same thing to you and me. He is watching. He is working. He is deceiving. He is accusing. Why? So that he can develop a plan to destroy us. And the reason we must put on the full armor of God is so that we can withstand that in the evil day. And there may be some of you this morning that as you hear that, you're undone. Because you know that you've been deceived into sin in the past. You know you've fallen short of God's design for your life. You know what it feels like to experience that guilt and shame and judgment as if you can never have freedom from the burden that you carry for the wrongs that you've done in your life. And the gospel is reminding us of here this morning is that it's true of every one of us apart from Christ. But God has made a way. He sent

His only Son to live a perfect life. To resist every deception, every temptation that satan laid before Him. To stand accused, falsely by the crowds and falsely by the enemy, in order to die on the cross as a payment for our sins. To be raised from the grave so that we can know we can finally have lasting victory before God. And that offer is to you this morning. Have you ever experienced Jesus as your Savior and your captain? Captain Tom Moore was back in the headlines in England and he was knighted last month. Not because of some act of valor that he had accomplished on the battlefield 75 years ago in World War II. Instead, he received these accolades and all this attention for something else entirely. See he decided he was going to set out on a challenge. He was 99 and getting ready to turn 100. He can only use a walker in order to get around. And he decided he wanted to raise some money for the nation of the United Kingdom to support Coronavirus relief. And so he put out a challenge that if he could walk laps in his garden behind his house, that people would donate money and raise it. He set out a goal to raise a thousand pounds. And instead, as media attention gravitated towards it, and as he completed his laps over the course of those number of days, ahead of things. Instead of helping the country to raise one thousand pounds, he raised the equivalent of 40 million dollars. He brought together an entire country. He was rewarded in the moment. He was given that status as knight. He was praised by the people. Not because he helped them to win a victory that brought freedom in the past, but instead because he galvanized the nation, helping them to live in the midst of the victory that they have right now against an invisible enemy. And that's the picture that Paul's laying out for us here when he speaks of putting on the full armor of God in Ephesians 6. That we should come together in one heart and one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel, putting on Christ who is the armor of God in order to resist an invisible enemy.

Let's pray together.

Lord, Your ways are above our ways. Your thoughts are above our thoughts. Your strength is beyond our strength. And we're coming to you now in this time saying, "Lord, we need to find our strength in You. We see a world around us that is ravaged by violence in our country right now." There is hardship, there is division, there is strife. And we know that in the midst of these moments that they are symptomatic of this deeper spiritual conflict that Paul is reminding us here this morning. And I pray for those of us in the midst here. Whether they are in person or gathered with us online that You will strengthen us as we put on Christ who is the armor of God. That we might fight against the devil and resist his ways and live in a manner worthy of the gospel. We ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.