

A CLEAR AND PRESENT VICTORY

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Folder: Worthy of the Calling

Readings: Ephesians 6:18-24

Now some of us, many of us I hope, are familiar with using the armour of God for defence. For example, one of Satan's favourite schemes is to bring to mind a past sin, a major blunder, something that makes us cringe. I think we all have some of these! And though we've repented and have experienced God's forgiveness the devil loves to accuse us and bring us under false condemnation. A voice in the back of our head starts up, "You call yourself a Christian. Look at what you did. What a failure. You're a hypocrite every time you open the Bible, pray or go to church." But against this, we take up the shield of faith to quench these fiery arrows of false condemnation and with the sword of the Spirit we declare, out loud a Bible verse like Romans 8:1



Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1–2

And the result? We stand firm. Why? Because we have the shield of faith in one hand and the sword of the Spirit in the other. Great defence. Well done. But is this all. I mean what about offence? What about moving to the initiative? What about taking on to the devil? No war's won by defence only. How can we go on the attack? Having stood firm what are our next steps? This is what we've going to look at today.

You see, in any major conflict there's a key moment when there's a move from the back foot to the front, retreat turns to advance and defence turns into offence. In the Pacific theatre of World War 2 it was when the allies landed on the island of Guadalcanal. Having retreated time and time again since the outbreak of hostilities retreat now turned to advance, island by island, until final victory was won. In the North African campaign, it was at El Alamein the allies finally moved from the back to the front foot that eventually saw Germany's Afrika Korp soundly defeated. And it was the Normandy landings on D-Day which turned, what had been defence only in Western Europe, to the offensive and final victory 11 months later

It's similar with spiritual warfare where defence turns to attack. So today, as we move to the front foot, to the advance and to the offensive we'll look at three things...

- I. The Goal
- II. The Strategy
- III. The Implementation

... of our Spiritual Campaign. For, to win in battle we need to be clear about our goal. And then we need to be clear about how to reach the goal, our strategy. Finally, we need to be clear about what we need to do, that's implementation.

I. The Goal

So, what is the goal of our offensive campaign. If the goal of our defensive is all about standing firm and not caving into the devil's schemes what's our goal for our offence?

To answer this let's look to our Commander in Chief, Jesus, and his words in the Gospel of John.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

So, our default is to perish. If we do nothing each of us is destined to perish. We're talking hell, which is grimmer than we can imagine. But John 3:16 tells us the whole point of Jesus' coming - the goal of his mission - was to rescue us from perishing and give us eternal life. John 3:36 emphasizes the dire situation we are in.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. John 3:36

Unless we are rescued by Jesus, God's wrath on us and we are destined for judgment and hell.

Listen as John 10:10 develops this idea...

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. John 10:10

Specially, Satan's goal in this battle is to steal, kill and destroy; to keep is on the broad road that leads to destruction. While Jesus' goal is to bring us abundant life, the narrow road that leads to eternal life.

So, our goal in spiritual warfare is the same as Jesus' and can be summed up like this: **to rob hell to populate heaven**. We call this "mission" - to share Jesus with those who don't know him and then see those who respond established in the kingdom: evangelism and discipleship.

II. The Strategy

If the goal of spiritual warfare is to rob hell to populate heaven what's our strategy? What's our focus? Well, our Ephesians passage gives us two strategies. Chapter 6 verse 18...

Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me. Ephesians 6:18-19a

a. Prayer

The first strategy in spiritual warfare, the first thing we do to rob hell to populate heaven, is pray. It's crucial. It's our priority. It's core to success. When we pray we're kept safe and see results. If we don't pray, we are troubled, distracted, derailed and even defeated.

Notice in verse 18 we are instructed how to pray. We are to pray in the Spirit. Now, the phrase "praying in the Spirit" has potential to be misunderstood. For those with a Pentecostal or Charismatic background they can think this is an encouragement to speak in tongues in prayer. However, though speaking in tongues is a legitimate gift of the Holy Spirit, elsewhere the Bible makes it clear that not everyone has this gift. But here in Ephesians the Bible is clear that every Christian is to pray in the Spirit, not just those with a particular gift. So, if you have the gift of tongues by all means use it in spiritual warfare but praying in the Spirit is for all Christians, not just those with this gift.

Others may think praying in the Spirit is being overwhelmed with ecstatic feelings or entering a trance like state. And though some Christians may experience something like this from time to time, this is not at all the focus nor intent of praying in the Spirit.

The clue to what praying in the Spirit actually is can be found in the preceding verse. The previous verse, verse 17, instructs us to do what? Take up the sword of the Spirit. Which is what? The Word of God. So, praying in the Spirit is **praying the Word of God**.

Now what does this look like? Well, since New Year I've encouraged and challenged each of us to do what? To read a Psalm a day and to pray a Psalm a day. And each time you do, you unsheathe the sword of the Spirit and pray in the Spirit. When you quote scripture in prayer, you're welding the sword of the spirit and praying in the Spirit. Likewise, when your prayers agree with and run alongside God's Word.

And so, one morning in your devotional time you have a concern for a friend suffering from depression. Now she's not a Christian but you feel for her and long for her to be healthy. Now, you happen to be reading Psalm 107...

Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons...
they fell down, with none to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the
shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart. Psalm 107:10 & 12-13

And you think - that's her. That's Jane! I'm going to pray these verses. "Lord I pray for Jane who's trapped in darkness, in the shadow of death and who's a prisoner to dark thoughts and depression. I pray that your love will break through and that she'll cry to you for help. I praise you that because of the cross, Christ can deliver her from all her depression. You've brought me out of my dark place and broken my bonds and you can do it for Jane. I come against the devil in all his scheming in Jesus' name and pray your victory in Jane's life. Through Christ I pray. Amen"

What are you doing here? You're using the sword of the Spirit, the Bible to pray in the Spirit. You're on the offensive. You're working with Christ to rob hell to populate heaven.

b. Proclaim

This brings us to the second staggering, Ephesians 6:18-20

(pray) also for me that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. Ephesians 6:18–20

If prayer is our first strategy our second is to open our mouth and proclaim the gospel. We pray and then we tell people about Jesus. So, you're catching up over coffee with Jane and you say, "Jane, God loves you so much that he sent his one and only Son, Jesus, that you need not languish in darkness, but have abundant life."

You see, Paul's prayed for opportunities like this to share Jesus and so must we. And how did Paul specifically pray? Firstly, he prayed for right **words** to proclaim. Why? So that he could communicate with accuracy and compassion in the circumstances he finds himself in. And his circumstances are prison. Yet, even in prison he prays for the right words. And for who - for fellow prisoners and for the guards.

Now, not only does Paul pray for the right words but he also prays for **boldness** and he prayed this twice. Why, because it's not easy to tell people about Jesus. You don't need me to tell you this! When we share Jesus with others some are open, but others respond with apathy, ridicule or even anger. I mean consider this: why did they stick Jesus on a cross? Because of the Gospel - for his proclaiming he was the only way to the Father. And why was Paul in prison? For proclaiming the Gospel, that Jesus is the only way to the Father and eternal life. However, instead of cowering and keeping his head down Paul prays for what? For the right words and extra courage.

And his prayers are answered. We see in Paul's letter to Philippians, another of his prison letters. He writes...

I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me (*my imprisonment*) has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. Philippians 1:12–13

Though in physical chains Paul is not chained spiritually. He engages in spiritual warfare. He prays and proclaims, and hell is robbed to populate heaven.

And we follow Paul's example. We pray for the right words and boldness so we can share Jesus. And you don't need me to tell you how important this is. I mean if I were to ask you what's stopping you sharing Jesus with a friend most would respond - fear of not having right words and a lack of boldness. And the Bible is clear, we can overcome! The Holy Spirit will give us courage and the right words when we step out in faith.

Now, we've looked at the goal of spiritual warfare - to rob hell to populate heaven. We've also seen the two strategies to make this happen - prayer and proclaiming. Now let's turn to the implementation. How can we make this happen, ourselves?

III. Implementation

Now, implementation is another word for “take home”. What are our take homes? What can we do with what we’ve just been hearing? Firstly, to praying in the Spirit.

Now, I kid you not. As I was in my office writing the earlier section about using Psalm 107 to guide our praying in the Spirit, Nicola popped into my office with a small package. The package was from Derek Prince ministries and I hadn’t ordered it. Opening it up I found 30 different proclamation cards - each taking scriptures and using it in the exact same way as I was writing. What an encouragement to see the Holy Spirit active in the preparation as in the preaching! So, each of you have a proclamation card in your newsletter. On the back is half a dozen Bible verses and on the front is these verses turned into a prayer to speak out over yourself, someone else or a circumstance. In your hand is a helpful aid to praying in the Spirit, one of the key strategies of offensive spiritual warfare. Take God’s Word, pray it and proclaim it. As you do, you’ll grow in the handling of the Sword of the Spirit and you will be learning to pray in the Spirit. Imagine if all of us give this a go and grew in this area. It will transform our lives, our church and this community for Christ. Amazing!

This brings to our second strategy, proclaiming the Gospel – sharing Jesus. Now I you to know that I find it just as difficult as most of you when it comes to making that first step in sharing Jesus. Getting over that barrier. Why? Because I wonder if I’ll have the right words and how will the person react. What I need is prayer to be boldness and prayer for the right words. Not perfect words but words the Holy Spirit can use to reach the person.

You see, even Paul the great Apostle and master evangelist asked for prayer so he could be bold and have the right words. And so we pray likewise, for boldness and the right words.

And Alpha is a help us in this area. Alpha is a ten week, extremely well-put together program to help people explore and ask questions about the Christian faith. It’s one proven way to share the Good News about Jesus. However, success is determined by us inviting people, personally - having the boldness to invite. Now the Hope Project Booklets we’re dropping into letter boxes is a helpful way to get the Good News into people’s households. However, it’s nowhere as good as personal sharing or a personal invitation to Alpha or the like. Do pray for who you can invite to Alpha. I’ll be praying for boldness and the right words. And pray this for me as well. And if someone you invite says “yes “- come with them - for the whole course if you can. Delivery of Christian literature is great, invitation to a program like Alpha is better and a personal one on one conversations even better still. These are three ways we can implement the strategy of proclamation the Gospel.

So, let’s sum up and finish off the letter of Ephesians. Today we’ve continued with spiritual warfare with a focus on going on the attack. Our goal in battle is to rob hell to populate heaven. To do this we have two strategies: to pray in the Spirit and proclaim the Gospel. And none of us can do this effectively in our own strength. In fact, if we attempt spiritual warfare in our own strength, we will be crushed, defeated, chewed up and spat out. So, we pray for more of God’s Spirit, a fleshing in filling, for the right words and boldness to say them. Finally, we looked at implementation. What we can do today, this week, this month and beyond. We can take Bible verses to pray in the Spirit and we can proclaim – which means share Jesus - in a personal conversation or invitation to the Alpha program.

And with this said in done Paul is ready to sign off his letter. And he does so with these words.

So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.
Ephesians 6:21–24

We also finish this incredible, rich and encouraging book of the Bible with these words ringing in our ears. Verse 24 “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.” *Let's pray*