

Midweek Message

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”

(2 Timothy 2:1-4 ESV)

We don't often think of ourselves as soldiers, do we? However, the Scriptures certainly do indicate that we are at war, although it's a spiritual war in which we're engaged. As we saw this past Sunday from 1 Peter 4:12-19 we will face times of persecution for the faith and as such we must fight the good fight of faith as a faithful soldier of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Sometimes I wonder if believers forget that we're really on the same side and that the enemy is over there and not within our own ranks. It's always so disheartening to me when I hear of churches fighting over things that are so inconsequential to the gospel such as the color of the walls or the kind of carpet or what type of curtains. I know there are times when false teachers get into churches and begin to lead the flock astray and that certainly is a time to engage in the spiritual battle. However, many times churches tend to get all in a panic over those things that have very little to do with the call of our Lord to spread the good news of salvation. With that being said I would like to share with you the three main areas in which believers are to engage in the spiritual battle and fight the good fight of faith.

First, we're to engage in the fight against the flesh. When we come to faith in Jesus that's when we enter the battlefield, primarily against our own sinfulness. Our conversion, this new life in Jesus, creates a scenario in which we battle within ourselves over doing what we now know to be right and proper versus what we used to do before our conversion. The Apostle Paul said it quite well when he wrote,

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin” (Romans 7:15-25 ESV).

Listen, that battle rages within the life of every believer in Jesus. Even though we've been given new life through our union with Christ, we still must fight to overcome all our old sinful habits. Sin is so entrenched within us that this battle will continue throughout our lives as we live in this fallen world until we either leave this world or Jesus Himself returns. The wonderful good news is that we've been forgiven of all sins, past, present, and future, and that through the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, we can strive to overcome, by God's grace, our sinful thoughts, words, feelings, attitudes, and actions. For the sake of the gospel and our testimony in this world, we must always strive to live in holiness so that the name of Jesus will be praised.

Second, we're to engage in the fight against the world. Now, when we talk about the world, we're not necessarily talking about people but against the system of disbelief that's so prevalent in this fallen and cursed world. Sometimes, as believers, we can get caught up in the desires of worldly pursuits and pleasures that often lead us away from our true purpose in life. There are many believers who strive to gain the most of what this world offers and they lose sight of what God is calling us to be and do. We sometimes think that achieving the 'good old American dream' is what life is really all about and we don't even realize

the danger that comes with it. The Apostle Paul makes this clear in his first letter to Timothy as he warns us of this threat when he writes,

“But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Timothy 1:6-10 ESV).

You see, what’s really important is that of our character, our personal purity, our living in holiness and being content with what God has given us. Now, that doesn’t mean that having things this world offers is necessarily wrong. We’re told in this same passage, *“As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy” Timothy 6:17 ESV*. You see, everything in life is given by God for us to enjoy. The issue isn’t in what we have but why we have it and what we’re doing with it. It’s really all about our priorities in life and whether or not God is truly the passion of our lives. The Apostle John warns us as well when he writes,

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17 ESV).

We need to be careful about what we’re pursuing in life as the passion of our lives which actually begins in the view we hold regarding what life is to be all about. That’s why the Apostle Paul tells us, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2 ESV)*. You see, the way in which we think will be the way in which we live and we must be sure our worldview is in line with God’s Word.

Finally, we’re to engage in the fight against our adversary, the devil. There are many in our world who don’t believe in a personal devil. However, Scripture certainly presents us with the reality of his existence. He was in the garden and was responsible for tempting Eve and then Adam. He was responsible for the torment of Job, although he was restricted by God as to how much he could do. He even tempted Jesus, three times, and even asked permission to sift Peter like wheat. It’s probably no wonder that Peter tells us, *“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Peter 5:8 ESV)*. Peter obviously had firsthand experience and as such warns us of our adversary’s ways. James tells us, *“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7 ESV)*. The point seems obvious, that we have a powerful foe who seeks to undermine all that God has done, and is doing, in our lives and in this world. However, we must remember that God has given us all we need for the fight when He says,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:10-12 ESV).

You see, our battle isn’t against flesh and blood, that is, against the people who are caught in the darkness but against the evil powers that are holding them there. That’s why we have the armor of God that tears down the spiritual forces of darkness. As we live out the gospel and proclaim its truth, we engage in the battle to set people free and our world is changed, one life at a time.

Pastor Mark