

The Wartime Church

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[0 : 0 0] 1177 of the church bibles ephesians chapter 6 verse 10 finally be strong in the lord and in his mighty power put on the full armor of god so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms therefore put on the full armor of god so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after you have done everything to stand stand firm then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist with the breastplate of righteousness in place and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace in addition to all this take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of god 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 all the lord's people pray also for me that whenever i speak words may be given me so that i will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel for which i am an ambassador in chains pray that i may declare it fearlessly as i should this is the word of the lord thanks earlene sorry i'm not meant to be up and down quite so much it was just because of the prayers um must have been a problem for anne getting in but um we're going to be looking together at ephesians 6 if you could keep your bibles open there that would be a great help and there is an outline inside the notice sheet if that would help you as we look at that together but let's ask for god's help as we turn to his word let's pray father in heaven we thank you that your word gives us all that we need for salvation and to live following your will and we pray that you would call us as a church community to be the people you want us to be that by your spirit you would transform us to be a community that glorifies your name so we pray that tonight you'll be at work in us as we hear your voice in the scriptures in jesus name amen so we're in this foundational series as we head into the autumn at saint silas the living church where we're looking at a few passages in the bible that perhaps provoke us thinking well what kind of community does god call us to be as a church that's what we're doing and we've uh the first week we were looking at how god calls us to be a cross-centered church that we are to know that on our own we have a great sin problem with god that we cannot deal with and that god has been pleased delighted even to deal with it through the cross so that nothing more is needed to atone for our sin and we are centered on that truth that the cross then we looked at how we're to be a word-centered church because the big thing that jesus is doing in the world today is he is slowly but powerfully building his kingdom he's taking over the world by scattering his word that's clear from his story of the farmer who sows the seed that that's what jesus is doing in the world today and if we're going to be a church on board with jesus agenda for the world we're to be a word-centered church scattering that word among ourselves and across the city then we saw what the fruit of that would be last week that a church that is really fixed on the cross and scattering the word of god should be

a loving church and how if we're a church where what you see is gifts but not love then we are deeply unattractive to god god wants to see us as a loving community but those things are really difficult to do as a church it's remarkable how hard it is to remain centered on the cross building a church on the foundation of the word of god and loving one another now why is it so hard to do that well i think this evening tells us why it's that whether or not we realize it we are a wartime church i was thinking a bit about war because of the sermon right and i started doing some reading about scottish history i was thinking about how if you look at the age range in our church family it's it's actually a pretty unusual time in scottish history that you could look around our church which has some elderly people in it as well as very young people in it and nobody in their adult life has lived in scotland at a time when we've lived under the threat of war serious invasion and then going back over time i was thinking about if we were living here 700 years ago right in glasgow our whole lives

would have been framed by the conflicts that were going on in scotland at that time it was conflict with england and that's what i've been reading all about bit controversial this okay but king edward the first of england he he'd been called in to help in a dispute in scotland but he said he would only help if scotland recognized that he was overlord of scotland which the scots didn't particularly like and then um he crushed the scots in the battle of berwick in 1296 apparently was extraordinarily brutal although i don't think the scots were saints at the time um then william wallace as we all know from that historically accurate film brave hearts led a rebellion against edward the first and he was defeated the battle of falkirk then he got hung drawn and quartered which is very unpleasant and then and there was another uprising robert the bruce battle of bannockburn in stirling the scottish army won a famous victory against a much bigger english army and 14 years later there was a peace treaty finally between england and scotland that recognized scotland had the right to independent rule but all of that if you were alive 700 years ago there was a period where your whole life was marked by scotland being ruled by a hostile foreign power the english and not being able to throw that off that brutal regime and when you live in a country under that kind of in that kind of environment it it shapes the way people live people make great sacrifices for the war effort people live in poverty because of the the efforts they're having to make to support the battle war affects the whole way people go about their lives and if you don't want to go back that far you can just go to the the people's palace at glasgow green and see about life during the second world war in glasgow and how it affected people's lives now what we're thinking about tonight is how we as christians we're on the front line of a war to be involved in church is to be on a battlefield and yet most of the time one of our biggest issues is that we don't even realize it so our first point this evening is wake up to the fight have a look with me at verse 12 paul says for our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms so notice very important we're not at war with people it's very important that if we think that our battle as a church is against people then we'll end up categorizing some people as enemies to be defeated we'll feel self-righteous we will be harsh with

people whereas the bible um is well it humbles all of us and we have to recognize that all people including us are sinners in need of a savior nobody is any different from that and so we're not to be harsh with anybody we're to love even those who would make themselves our enemies we're not aggressive with people but then more daunting really is to realize that there is a great spiritual conflict going on a cosmic spiritual war between forces of good and forces of evil now lots of us find that difficult to get our heads around because we live in a city where our education would say that all that you can see is all that there is and the idea that there is some kind of spiritual realm of forces of good and evil goes against our presuppositions in the way we're educated and yet in other cultures people would have no problem in recognizing that there are dark forces in the world that it actually helps to explain how humanity can be capable of the most wonderful amazing acts of altruism and kindness and yet the most devastating terrible acts of wickedness and in fact there's an atheist writer andrew delbanco who's written a book he's an atheist a book called the death of satan and he says this a gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it you see what he's saying he's saying that because we we don't even like to use the term evil anymore we don't like moral absolutes we want to talk about things like dysfunction or disorder and we we can't really talk about really bad things we we kind of lost the language and yet we're more aware of them than ever because of 24-hour news we can access and stories about the most horrible things going on and you just have to look in as well in in a bookshop at the sort of top-selling paperbacks for holiday reads and there's some really dark stuff out there you can read about the minds of serial killers and criminals so we're confronted with all this stuff and yet we've lost the language to describe it and god's word makes sense of what's going on you see god's word warns us that we're not just shaped by evil within us in our hearts though there is evil in our hearts and we're not just shaped by evil out with us in our culture that influences us now in fact we're also shaped by evil over us that there is a powerful personal evil force working in our world today and he is in conflict with the good god so that's that there is a spiritual conflict going on why would it affect us it's because the big thing that god is doing in the world today for his glory is building a church and ephesians tells us all about that now there's a great cheat to understanding ephesians right and it's all the tens so i'm just going to show you that just look in ephesians just to quickly fast forward through ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 chapter 2 verse 10 chapter 3 verse 10 so you can remember this so next when you're on the bus tomorrow

someone says what's ephesians all about 1 10 2 10 3 10 and you'll be there chapter 1 verse 10 it talks about how god's big plan to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment is to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under christ so history is going somewhere god's got a plan for the whole cosmos he's going to bring everything together under christ that's what he's doing turn on to chapter 2 verse 10 and it says for we that's the church are god's handiwork created in christ jesus to do good works which god prepared in advance for us to do so as god has that eternal salvation plan to unite all things under jesus he sweeps up people that as we put our trust in jesus he forgives us he redeems us he adopts us into god's family and he has all these good works prepared in advance that we will do for him in our lives so his purpose for the world gives us a new purpose for our lives and where does that cash out chapter 3 verse 10 he says this god his intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom of god should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in christ jesus our lord so god is acting through history for his glory by saving a people who are diverse and that would never normally have anything to do with each other and drawing them in and uniting them together under christ in the church and as god does that he is he shows his wisdom to the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms so angels and demons look on in wonder at the wisdom of god when they see the church so the church is god's trophy cabinet he's acting to show his marvelous wisdom to the spiritual universe by and at the centerpiece of the trophy cabinet is the church as people look on and go i just can't believe that those guys hang out together and are united together but christ has done it for us so that's what's going on and that means that as christians we are right in the devil's firing line because if he can undermine the church he can attack the thing that glorifies god the most how would he do that well he would want to divide us because our unity glorifies god and he wants to reduce us by picking us off one by one pulling us away from the faith that reconciles us to god and each other so in verse 16 of ephesians six we're told that the devil throws fires flaming arrows at us you know you see that on films don't you in kind of medieval warfare and archery archery and they have bows and arrows and they light the arrows and they fire them in to start fires that's really dangerous thing well what are those flaming arrows look like in reality well the devil his name means slanderer or liar and satan the other name for the devil means accuser so the way that satan the devil operates today is he tempts us and he accuses us and he tempts you by hiding god's goodness from you then he accuses you by hiding god's love from you so he tempts you by saying go against god's commands because god isn't good he makes you think that god's will wouldn't be good for you because god isn't good he hides god's goodness from you and then when you've sinned he hides god's love from you so that you end up thinking to yourself i can't go back to god i can't be a real christian if i've done all that stuff god can't forgive me some of the ways that god uh that the devil might tempt us to turn away from god he'll make sin look more attractive than living for god he will overstress the mercy of god so that you think i can do this because god will forgive me anyway that's his job he'll make you feel self-pity so that you think i deserve this i deserve this bit of selfishness i deserve this self-indulgence i'm too tired i'm too busy i don't have people don't look after me enough self-pity he'll show you non-christians around you and he will make it look to you as though they're having a better time than you that their choices have been wiser choices than yours so he tempts you and then once you've sinned he can accuse you and think you think to yourself i can't come back to god i'm not achieving anything in this christian life i can't pray and we drift so the devil doesn't leave you with fangs in the flesh he leaves you with lies in your heart and we need to wake up to the fight john piper the writer he talks about the dangers of as a church developing a peacetime mentality you know when people are living in peacetime they um they live for comfort and they are complacent and relaxed they take the easy path in life but when there's a war you use your resources very differently i went on a cruise when i was a teenager an amazing holiday as a teenager this cruise ship the canberra and then when you get on the canberra there's a massive picture of the canberra during the falklands war when as a the cruise ship was turned into a hospital ship because in in the war effort the cruise liners were taken to be part of a battle and in times of war people make unusual and striking sacrifices for the sake of the campaign they go without normal things that they otherwise would have thought they need they live lives with intensity we need to be like that as a church we need to be sober minded intense sacrificial but as we do that we don't think we'll win on our own our second point is this look for power in the fight if you just look at how paul how weak paul says we are in verse 10 have a look at verse 10 he says finally be strong in the lord and in his mighty power put on the full armor of god so that you can take your

stand against the devil's schemes so then about you but i think as paul writes that the implication is that we are weaklings we have to take strength from somebody else because on our own we're very weak and not only that he tells us to put on armor so without that we go into a battlefield we're weaklings and we're naked i don't think you get very far in an ancient battlefield naked and weak and paul is showing us that there is power but we don't have it and looking around you have to admit that don't you that we're not spiritual powerhouses around here on our own we're not righteous people who can smash the devil ourselves it's not a good position to be in but thankfully there's all the power that we need in the lord we see that earlier in ephesians there are two great prayers in ephesians and both times they're power prayers so in chapter one he says that he prays that god's people that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know god's incomparably great power for us who believe and then he says the power for us as the church today is the same as the mighty strength god exerted when he raised jesus from the dead and put him in heaven to reign forever that's the power god gives to us as his church at the end of chapter three he says god is able to work immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work in us so we're to be wary of the devil but we're not to be terrified of the devil i'd imagine that normally in a battle even the best general would have to rely on the skill of their foot soldiers but for us it's the other way around we're the foot soldiers but it's got nothing to do with our skill and power and gifts it's all about the power of our general the lord jesus and we need to remember that when we're serving together as a church as soon as we start to think that it's about our energy and our power we're on the road to stress and exhaustion and burnout we won't forgive each other because we'll lack the strength to do that when we're wronged there are just too many things that we can't control too many things the devil can do to undermine us

[20 : 15] but instead if we depend on jesus and his strength if we fix our eyes on him our great hero then we'll find he is stronger than anything the devil can throw at us it's hugely liberating to remember that when we encounter problems as a church or as a network of churches if somebody falls into shameful sin in our congregation or somebody walks away from the faith or we're hit by some severe persecution as a congregation and we identify that we're under spiritual attack the temptation is to think we've got to solve that ourselves that from within us we've got to find the skills and become experts to put things right but instead we're called to put our confidence in the lord in his mighty power so we exercise prayerful dependence on him we seek his will and we don't worry when we feel weak certainly i've seen that over the last couple of years at saint silas there have been times when i've thought i just haven't got a clue what we do here i don't know what to do and our eyes have been on god we've prayed and we've seen god at work at that moment i think that's what god does sometimes he gets us to the point where it's really obvious that we can't do anything so that when he answers our prayers there's no doubt it was him so we wake up to the fight and we look for power in the fight how then do we fight that's our third point we wear god's armor for the fight and paul gives us this list of armor in verses 13 to 17 and the temptation is just a picture in your mind a roman soldier and you can do that but primarily the picture that paul's using here is an old testament picture of god's messiah coming to save it's in isaiah isaiah 59 god promises that his anointed one will come and there'll be this great victory it's a promise of jesus coming and it says that the lord will come with righteousness as his breastplate the helmet of salvation on his head and his great and terrible day of judgment will come so that's the day that's the future with jesus when he destroys evil forever as this great warrior he'll come in glory and he'll win a great victory and he's already mortally wounded the devil god's mighty arm of salvation has already made the devil a defeated enemy and he did that through the apparently terrible weakness of the cross just think about the power of the cross against the devil the devil wanted jesus dead but the devil wants us to doubt god's goodness and now if we're ever tempted to doubt god's goodness if we're looking at god's god's ways and thinking this can't be good for me i don't think god is good we look at the cross and we see god has demonstrated his goodness in history by redeeming us while we were still sinners at great cost to himself and the devil wants us to doubt god's mercy that is that when we sin he wants us to think we can't turn back to god but when the devil's tempting us to doubt god's mercy again we look at the cross and we see that god has demonstrated in history that he will be merciful to us forever because he's paid for our sin there it looks weak it's extraordinarily powerful the cross the devil was defeated by it so what do we do in the spiritual battle well we fight against the devil the same way that jesus fought against him the aim is to stand if you just see that repetition of the word in the verses go from verse 13 therefore put on the full armor of god so that when the day of evil comes you may be able to stand your ground and after

you've done everything to stand stand firm then you stand in a battle because you've got something you've already got the ground you're not you don't need to gain something because christ has given you all things and you just have to keep hold of it

standing firm is about keeping going as a church in gospel unity loving each other centered on the word of god and then paul describes the armor that equips us to stand it's the foundations of our faith so he talks about the belt of truth because the devil will lie to us and we put on the belt of truth the truth of jesus jesus is the truth the breastplate of righteousness that is the gospel truth that by putting my faith in jesus god looks on me as righteous because jesus righteousness covers me then we have the shoes of readiness your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace that we're ready to serve god because we know we're at peace with him then our shield and our helmet verse 16 take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one take the helmet of salvation you see what's going on here salvation righteousness faith peace they're just all different angles on the gospel on the momentous news of what jesus achieved for us at the cross our salvation that's what our lives are to be armed with and it goes on like that you can't imagine a soldier can you thinking to himself one day my armor has been useful so far but i'm just not going to put it on today i think i'll wear something else when i go out to battle a soldier would never think like that you wear your armor for as long as you're in a war and so for us we need to stay alert and stay armed by sticking with the gospel story and paul doesn't stop with the armor so our final point this evening our fourth point is take up weapons in the fight if you have a look with me at verse 17 he says take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of god and then look at the emphasis here he says 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 all the lord's people so we we advance in the gospel by praying about everything for everyone all the time in every different way the devil is powerful and devious but when we get on our knees we summon in a greater authority and though we pray about everything all the time the emphasis of our prayers is on getting the gospel out on jesus kingdom advancing in the war so paul asks the ephesians to pray for him that he'll preach the gospel faithfully and clearly he wants the boldness the courage to be a good soldier getting the gospel out and those prayers work alongside the unleashing of the sword of the spirit the word of god so we pray bible prayers and then we go out with the word of god the sword of the spirit it's quite a different picture of prayer isn't it from how we often understand prayer or think about prayer john piper again uses this contrast he talks about how we often revert to thinking of prayer a bit like a call bell for summoning the butler it's a bit like getting the butler to come and give you a cushion because you're feeling a bit uncomfortable but actually we're better off thinking of prayer more like a walkie-talkie on a battlefield it's a means of summoning heavenly firepower because we're under artillery fire so if you think about the lord's prayer when we say to god your kingdom come we're asking jesus to advance his invasion as he establishes his rightful rule in the world against a hostile power when we pray to god your will be done we know that what that means is that a new ruler is coming to conquer when we pray give us today our daily bread we're thinking about the rations that we need just to keep going in the spiritual war basic rations for the troops

deliver us from the evil one is an urgent prayer because our enemy is very dangerous prayer is much more dynamic and urgent when you remember that you're in a battle so the call to be god's church is an incredible one an incredibly purposeful one for your life but a challenging one that were to be centered on the cross based on the word bearing the fruit of love after tonight let's grasp more consciously that as we do that we're on the battlefield in a cosmic war so that we watch for the devil and wonderfully we look to the lord for the power remembering that we can wear the armor of gospel truth and the devil has no place to turn because jesus is more powerful than him then we get on the front foot with urgent prayer sincere prayer amen we're going to discuss that together for a few minutes and so there's some questions on the on the screen just to think a bit about this language of armor and flaming arrows how does it help us think a bit differently about life together as a church what do you think about the picture of jesus as a powerful conquering captain coming to overthrow a hostile power and in what ways could you could we pray differently in light of this call to be a wartime church let's just spend a few minutes in twos and threes talking through some of that and then we'll respond by singing together