**The Invisible Forces of Evil**

**Pastor Mark Willey:** One and everybody thanks to Josh and Randy for the music this morning, like an attorney in your Bibles this morning to Ephesians chapter six verses 10 through 12 we're beginning a new series this morning and it's centered on this section of verses. Chapter six of Ephesians, verse 10 down through verse 18 we're just going to look at the first three this morning.

Ephesians six verse 10 finally be strong in the Lord and the strength of his mind. 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.

Let's pray together.

Lord, we gathered this morning all throughout our area in our homes. And God, we realize that we are talking about a topic that is relevant for all of us because all of us are the recipients of a attack of conflict that all of us who name the name of Christ are living very much in this passage. Whether it is one that we're conscious of or not.

So Lord, I pray as we embark on this series, the invisible war that you would teach us, that we might grow deeper in our love and trust of you because of it. The you would be glorified in all these studies together. In Jesus name I pray. Amen. We're looking this morning at Ephesians six verses 10 through 12 the invisible war, and today specifically the invisible forces of evil as they're expressed in this passage.

Last week, we celebrated Easter, the ultimate victory of Jesus Christ over death, winning for his people, his bride, the body of Christ, new life, resurrection life that can be experienced in this world and certainly in the world to come. It says in Colossians one 13 about that event. What Jesus did, it says.

He delivered us out of the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the son of his love. God did that. The problem is the ruler of the power of darkness. Satan was not particularly thrilled of the work that God did through the Lord Jesus and accomplished on his cross and resurrection.

Satan had gone after Jesus, of course, and his, his earthly life and in his earthly mission and the resurrection had proved that he had been unsuccessful in stopping Jesus in his mission as he had been an utter failure to withstand the work of Christ. He now has retargeted his, his goal and is focusing his attention upon those that name, the name of Christ, that those are a part of.

Jesus' kingdom are those who are in fact at war. There are many passages. I'm just going to read a handful quickly, uh, because we're doing this series on the title of the invisible war, that there is a war that is always going on, but it is not. Observable with the physical eye, but it is something that we see the effects of both in our lives and in our world.

Here are some of the terms that are used in the new Testament to refer to this, this invisible war. Paul in Romans 13 says, put on the armor of light. Second Corinthians 10 we have, he says, these are the weapons of our warfare, and he talks about those in second Corinthians. 16 verse 13 be on your guard.

Stand firm in the faith. Be courageous, be strong. He's talking in a warfare passage in Ephesians six put on the whole armor of God. And then Paul at the end of his life and his last two letters just constantly referred to this. It's, it's almost as he's looking back over his life and he's realizing this is the, this is the, the, the picture of, of Christian experience that I most identify with.

And so he says things like this in first Timothy one, this charge, I commit to you son Timothy wage, the good warfare. He says in first Timothy six fight the good fight of faith and second Timothy two you therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. In chapter two verse three of second Timothy, you therefore, excuse me, in chapter second Timothy two verse four he says, no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life.

That he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier, and Paul and summarizing his own life says this. In second Timothy four seven, I have fought the good fight. I've finished the race. I have kept the faith. This is a recognized kind of a distasteful, um. Subject. I mean, most of us hate conflict, right? I mean, this is not a topic that we are, we are looking forward to thinking about.

We feel the tension in our country. Politically. We are more divided than United. It seemed in the rhetoric, rhetoric is intense. Even in the scene of Corona virus, we find that that, that we sense it getting intense right now as there's a competing set of values, competing priorities on one hand for the medical issues, the health issues on the other for the, the economic issues.

And we sense that, that those are starting to put people on opposite sides as to what to do next. Many of you have conflict with loved ones or neighbors or former spouse or boss or coworkers and say, you might say, Mark, in the midst of all this, now we're going to have a sermon series on conflict and warfare.

I mean, I mean, this seems your timing is, is ethically bad, and I get it and I do understand it, but I would suggest this. The war that we're engaged in is not about being a fighter or a rabble rouser for Jesus. It is focused on defending ourselves against one who is out to destroy the vitality of our trust and walk with God who is trying to get us to doubt or to disregard God's compassion.

God's love. God's forgiveness. God's promises, God's protection. Spiritual warfare is a daily reality in our lives. Every day we are involved in it because we are under assault, conscious or unconscious. The adversary is not taking days off for him. There are no furloughed soldiers in the kingdom of God. He is coming after us all the time.

Satan does not accept the truce. He does not value, uh, an attempt that armistice so that there can be break in the action. We are always under attack if we belong to Christ. And Ephesians chapter six looks at this. It talks about the, the living reality of the Christian life. And in this we find that Paul begins our passage.

And if you remember what I read here in Ephesians chapter six see if you notice the word that continually is repeated. He says, we stand against the schemes of the devil. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers, against the spiritual forces.

He says six times against, against, against, against. That this is real. This is, this is a real situation of things coming at us. This morning, Paul gives this brief snapshot of this invisible war highlighted in verse 12 where it says, we are in conflict from spiritual forces of evil. And just by way of introduction of this series this morning, I just want to highlight.

Four quick things that we know about these spiritual forces of evil. And the first thing we notice is that there is a consciousness of evil. He says in verse 12 we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but rather. He says, we wrestle against other things, but the, the situation is, and the reality is, Paul did wrestle against flesh and blood.

He talks about it in different passages. He says on five different occasions, he, I was whipped 39 with 39 lashes. We're told in second Corinthians 11 he says three times I was beaten with rods. He was stoned and left for dead. And he says, I've been in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, and danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false brothers, Paul.

So what does he mean when he says we're not wrestling against flesh and blood? Well, he certainly did. Here's what he meant. He meant that that is not all we're dealing with, that we are not only wrestling in this conflict against others that, that are coming against us. He says there is something behind it all.

He is acutely conscious that there is a spiritual, natural instigation behind the evil. See, up until about 200 years ago. Everyone believed in, in devil's personal, supernatural, evil beings. And in the, the concept of original sin that people were, were, uh, their natures were, were oriented towards evil because of, of fall into sin.

But then it began to the, the evil in the world began to be blamed on all explainable circumstances, sociological or biological issues. The people in my life that have influenced me or, or just my, my, my wiring, the consensus was that we only wrestle. Against flesh and blood. That's the issue that we have this, we have this, this observable, and if we can just figure out what it is in our background or, or, or in our life situation that is causing us, we will understand.

We can, we can fix those issues, the biological, the sociological issues, and then we can get the rid of the, the problems of society. And today we have thrown away the intellectual resources for dealing with evil. Andrew Delbanco, Colombia, a university president at professor has written a book that is called the death of Satan.

And in his first sentence in the book, by the way, he is a, uh, he is a described secularist. He's not a, uh, a biblicist Christian. But in the first sentence of the book, he says this, a Gulf has opened in our culture between the visibility of evil. And our intellectual resources for coping with evil.

Basically what he's saying, and it's the premise of his book, is that evil was always there. It still is. Sin was always there. It still is, but we have gotten rid of the concept of evil and, and, and the, the empowerment of evil without getting rid of the reality. We got rid of the devil, but we have no way of understanding the astounding evil in our world.

And one of the illustrations he use is a preeminent one in the book, is to go to the, the movie, uh, the twisted movie, the silence of the lambs with Hannibal Lecter. And in this particular, um, book, he talks about how, uh, he gives, it, gives a scene where Lecter is being interviewed. He's now in jail for one of his many atrocious.

Things. He's a deranged, perverted, cannibalistic, a psychopathic killer, and inspector startling Starling is interviewing him and she asked him, what made you like this? It's a very contemporary question, and basically it assumes that whatever is wrong with him is circumstantial or, or unsupervised natural.

It is societal, biological, domestic. There's something that has happened to him and he responds in his creepy voice. Nothing has happened to me of officer Starling. I happened. You can't reduce me to a set of influences. You have given up good and evil for behaviorism. You got everyone and moral dignity pants.

Nothing is ever anyone's fault. Look at me, officer Starling. Can you stand to say that I'm evil? Delbanco goes on to say, these words are the epitome. Of modern horror and the modern dilemma. It is the horror of not being able to answer the Monster's question that you may question the idea of a personal devil or original sin, but be careful you don't dismiss it to quite quickly intellectually, because what do you say to the monster.

What do you say in the face of of astounding and and horrific evil. The Bible has an explanation for Hitler and for Hannibal Lecter and genocide and terrorist. What answer do you have if you did not believe that there is a supernatural being that is empowering the evil in our world? If you think it is just flesh and blood.

You will find yourself in capable of providing an adequate answer to the Monster's question. In our culture, there is a Gulf in explaining evil because we have kicked out the Bible's answer very simply. When Paul says, we're not just wrestling against flesh and blood, he says, we're conscious that there is an evil behind the evil we see.

The second thing we find is there is a conspiracy of evil. In verse 12 he says this, we're against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil. There's apparently a hierarchy of structure among Satan and those that followed him. The invisible enemies.

When Satan fell, the Bible tells us that one third of the angels of God joined him. And in doing so, there is some form of chain of command that's represented in this passage and also others in the scripture. Some are more powerful of these demon demonic followers. Fallen angels are more powerful than others.

Some are given greater dominion and authority, but all are evil and all are bent on. Doing the will and purposes of Satan. It is a power controlled a hierarchy. None of them, of course, are omnipresent. Uh, they're scary. Um, not fun to talk about him. Not a lot of fun to think about him. Um, but this hierarchical structure also reminds us that they are not omnipresent.

Satan is not everywhere. He is limited in, in time and place. Uh, so are all the demons. And, and as I've often said, one of the, one of the values of that is we can probably assume that none of us have ever personally had, uh, contact with Satan. I mean, we're, we're somewhere well down the chain of command that we're probably dealing with.

I don't know about you. I'm perfectly fine with that. But the idea is there is a conspiracy of evil. These spiritual forces. Operate in what this passage says, the heavenly realms, and that's another way of saying the unseen world around us. There is a conspiracy of people. Number three, there is a complexity of evil.

Verse 11 talks about the devil schemes. Jesus said it this way when he talks about the devil. He says in John 8:44 he was a murderer from the beginning. He is a liar and the father of lies, he is, first of all, he's a liar. He perverts truth. This is the methodology, not only of Satan, but of his entire dominion.

They lie about God. The very first temptation that was ever given to humankind came from Satan and it was about God. And they tempted him with the statement, did God really say that? He said that the ape, you know, he said, don't eat. Did he really say what you are hearing him say? And do you understand why he said that?

He knew that if you ate of that, that you would, you would, uh, have the power to discern good from evil and you'd be like God. And he distorted the perspective of God as if God was intentionally withholding some blessing from them. He distorts and perverts truth about God. He distorts truth about, um, about himself.

There are two CS. Lewis says it this way in his book, um, Screwtape letters actually mere Christianity, I'm sorry, mere Christianity. There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail the materialist who doesn't believe in the existence of a devil or a magician with the same delight most today, think too little of the devil. Most people have a hear about it, but, but it's, it's, it's. Other worldly. I mean, I probably, some of you listening right now, I think you can, anybody with anything beyond a second grade education really believe in a literal devil and the devil, one of his preeminent methodologies is to debunk the reality of, of who he is.

And so what he does is, is encourage a car catcher, a picture of him as a humanist character rather than one. Of horrific, evil and terror. Ever since Shakespeare's day when he was trying to, when he had the devil in his, uh, in his plays and he had him dressed in red, just to have him stand out, all of our pictures of him tend to be in red, that, that he is still perceived this way.

But there, it's, it's sort of a, uh, a humorous perspective. Rather than the seriousness of who he really is. He deceives about himself. He deceives people about themselves. Next week, we're going to look at this more through, I'm just going to highlight this, but especially to Christians. He is the great accuser.

He comes to us and, and he seeks to bring accusations against us. He, um, labor causes believers to labor under guilt and self-condemnation. He, he deceives. He will not come to you with an honest temptation. He'll make it appear different than it really is, but not only is he the liar, the one that perverts truth, but he also is the destroyer.

He hides his desire to destroy. He is filled with malice and hatred. He's the ultimate self promoting, destroying, being in the universe, and is very realm operates under those. Qualities. He delights in bloodshed and hatred and debauchery and pain in human suffering and above all else. He seeks to keep people from enjoying and knowing God.

C S Lewis in his book, Screwtape letters is writting fictitious but profoundly thoughtful picture of an elder, a demon that is writing to his younger. A protege. The protege is a guy named Wormtongue, and Screwtape is the, is the, the guiding demon. And in one particular thing, I just read a short excerpt.

He has given guidance on how to try to, to influence people. By deception and also to their harm. Here's what he says. My dear wormwood, the junior demon. Obviously you are making excellent progress with this guy. My only fear is less than attempting to hurry the patient. You awaken him to a sense of his real position.

We know we have introduced a change of direction in his course, but he was not be allowed to suspect that he is now. However, slowly heading right away from the sun. For this reason, I am almost glad to hear that he is still a churchgoer. Anything is better than his realizing the break he has made with the first months of this Christian life.

Let him think that he has a few new friends and amusements and then lead him into a comfortable complacency towards sin and serving the enemy. This dim, uneasiness needs careful handling. If it gets too strong, it may wake him up and spoil the whole game. Be patient and watch the decline in his passion for the enemy.

The enemy is talking about Christ. A few weeks ago you had to tempt him to unreality and inattention to his prayers. But now you will find him opening his arms to you and almost begging you to distract his purpose and Bynum his heart. You can keep him up late at night, staring at a dead fire in a cold room so that you will finally say, I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought know, what I liked.

Those religious duties just aren't as an enjoyable as they used to be. And then this, this culminating statement. Do you remember? The only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the enemy. And again, the enemy is Christ. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the light and into the nothing.

Indeed, the safest road is the gradual one. The gentle slope. Soft underfoot without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts. You're affectionate uncle Screwtape, we face a cunning and sinister enemy and what hope do we have to to in this, this invisible war. And that's my last thing. There is a.

There is a conquest over evil in these verses. Paul says this, finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. The contrast here is between satanic power and God's power, that the idea is that there are no personal reserves of power and strength that we draw upon in ourselves. We are cast on God as our hope and strength is a beautiful scene in the Lord of the rings.

It's a scene where Frodo, the little Hobbit again, it, it's the last one, the return of the King and he's now come to Mount doom. And the entire three books had been leading to this moment where he has faced just astonishing suffering and, and made choices to do the right thing and, and constantly and self sacrificed.

As a lifestyle with his little buddy, uh, Sam. And now he's come to the ring of D to the Mount doom and the, and he's to take the ring and throw it into the fire. And this will will break the power of, of the dark Lord and everything else. And he gets there and he's a, he's done all of this for all this time, all these months.

And he gets there and he says, I do not choose to do. What I had come to do anyway, takes the ring, which is now in his pocket and does what he should never do, which is to put it on, especially this close to the influence of Soren, and by putting the ring of power on a tips off all the powers of darkness that he's there and they're all raging to come after him, and it's a scene of total defeat.

He failed. That moment Gollum, if you know the story of this character that's crazed with, uh, addicted, uh, addictive behavior toward the ring, he had carried it himself for a while and come under its power. He comes flying out and wrestles with Frodo and actually bites his finger, gets the ring, grabs it, and then tumbles into the ring of fire.

And the ring is destroyed. But the picture is. I think brilliantly portrayed by talking to say Frodo needed help outside of himself. It was outside of himself that he found the deliverance. Gandalf had said long before this in talking about Gulen, when they were talking, should they put in the death because he was such a wicked character and they, they determined not to and goal, and Gandalf had said this, he may play a part.

He may play a part yet that neither he nor Soren have foreseen God. The the picture is that we are not capable in this battle to win against the forces of darkness. That's why it says be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. It also says in verse 11 put on the full armor of God. It is something you have already been given through Christ.

We're going to hear about the breastplate of righteousness, which actually protects our heart. And the picture is that is that it is talking about our standing in Christ, that that we've been given a new identity. In Jesus and, and, and, and we stand excepted in, in Jesus' own righteousness and the, the practical way that protects us from accusations and, and having to be a greater than and, and, and, and avoid that treadmill of evaluating ourselves.

The breastplate of righteousness is something we have already in Christ. The sword of the spirit that the dag of the short cert sword, that that refers to the specific promises that Christ has given to us in living our lives. The resources have already been given to us. And that's why in Romans chapter 13 verse 12 through 14 he says this, so then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires were to put on the armor of light and synonymous with that is putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in Christ victory in his resurrected life. We find these elements of the armor that enabled us to stand.

It's Christ's victory. It's Christ's power. It's Christ life within us and through us. That is our armor and enables us to live out a life differently even though we are the targets. As members of the kingdom of Christ in this world, in this generation, we have been given the resources we need to stand against our foal because we put on Christ.

Lord, we look to you this morning. God, as we or reminded just briefly with the somberness. Of the thought of actually being the objects of attack and hatred and of a real adversary or a real enemy that really wants to do harm. Lord, we thank you for the victory that was already won at the cross and the empty tomb, and we live now our lives in this world as those that have been purchased by Jesus.

And Lord, we're reminded of just how much you much love us. If the devil's greatest way of attacking you is to seek to do harm to us, Lord, we love you for that reality. And she used this name, we pray. Amen. Now go on peace to love and serve and enjoy.