

**Goal: The hearers would trust the promise of God in their spiritual battles.**

If you flip through the pages of scripture, you'll find the most famous battle in all of history. Standing in one corner at nine feet tall and weighing in at, well a lot, is the Philistine named Goliath. In the other corner is the young, Jewish shepherd boy named David. Well, I guess it wasn't that great of a battle. David slings one stone and the giant goes down. But if you back up a few verses, you'll read how King Saul tried to prepare young David by dressing him in his own armor. Of course, the kid needed some kind of protection against the huge giant, but Saul's armor was too big and bulky, so David took it off. Besides, he didn't need it, he had God's promise that God was going to deliver and protect His people. If David would have relied on his own wits and Saul's armor, there's no way he could've won. But David trusted God's promise and that made him ready for battle. Actually, as it turned out, it was over before it even began.

In a similar way, you and I are in a fight for the ages every day. It's a battle between good and evil, between life and death. You can feel the struggle, can't you? Fighting to stay healthy in body, mind, and spirit. As a country, we're fighting to remain free and just. As a society we fight against obesity and struggle to find adequate rest. Then there's the campaigns like "the fight against cancer" or "the fight against poverty" or "the fight against discrimination." So many battles, but those are the easy ones, because that's wrestling against flesh and blood.

There's a whole other level of battle we fight every day, that Paul describes like this, "***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: 12) So it's not only you against cancer and poverty, those are just skirmishes, while the real enemies, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places, are waging war against you. Even if you could defeat cancer or the common cold for the sake of the world, your cosmic enemies would simply change their method to the next weapon of mass destruction.

So, the battle rages continually, daily, exhaustingly. And if I was to take a cue from how wars are fought in this world, I guess I'd be like other preachers and try to psych you up, telling you to get up, gear up, and do your part. I'd tell you Jesus liberated you from darkness and enlisted you into His army of light. He's made you one of the good guys, so keep on fighting. Oh, you'll take a few hits, but it's up to you to push through and keep fighting. That's what faith is to some, the will to just keep fighting. In that type of sermon, the whole message is that the daily battle is pretty much all you. Jesus did His part on the cross, and now it's up to you to win the battle.

But if that's the case, then I've some bad news for you. You don't have a chance. If the battle is you versus the devil and all of his forces of evil, you're done for. And if you think you can win, you've already lost. If you think you're in control, I hate to tell you but you've already been taken a prisoner. And there's more bad news, your enemies have an ally on the inside, literally on the inside. Jesus says, (***“What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For) from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.” (Mark 7: 20 – 23)***) So, you're trying to take on the spiritual forces of evil, and your heart is on their side. Let's be honest, we're outnumbered and outgunned. Our only option we have is to switch sides. At least David had a chance, maybe Goliath would trip and fall on his sword or something. But you have a 0% chance of winning. Cemeteries are filled with the bodies of those who lost.

So, what's the Good News, because this sounds demoralizing. Well, here's the Good News, the battle's already been fought and won by Jesus. His grave is empty, because He has risen from the dead. The battle went like this, sin, death and devil accuse you saying, *“You're sinful, and so you're enslaved to sin. You're not holy, so you face God's judgment. The wages of sin is death, not just physical death, but eternal death.”* And Jesus says from the cross, *“I'll take that judgment. I'll suffer for the sins of the world. I'll suffer death and hell. I'll even suffer My Father's judgment.”* That's what He does on the cross, and because He's perfect, sin can't lay a finger on Him, death can't hold Him, and the devil loses. Jesus conquers all, and He shares His victory with you.

Think of a kid facing a bully on the playground. He's no match for the bully, so what does he say? *“I can't beat you, but wait 'til you meet my big brother!”* Facing death, sin and devil, that's what you and I do. Say, *“Sin, death, and the devil, there's no way I can beat you. But have you met Jesus? You had Him pinned to a cross and laid in a tomb. You thought that you had Him beat, but you didn't! He rose from the grave and conquered you. And you know what else? He's made me His own. Oh, you might get a couple of licks on me, but in Christ I already have God's blessing and eternal life.”*

You don't take on the forces of evil yourself. You repent, confessing all the times you've sided with your sinful heart, and you trust in Jesus who already won the battle for you. That's what Paul means when he says, ***“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. (Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of***

***salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6: 14 – 17)*** Many think this is a call to fight, but it’s really a call to faith.

How do you stand firm against the attacks of the devil? By confessing, *“I can’t defeat the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh, but I trust in Jesus who already has.”* That’s the belt of truth you wear, the truth of the Gospel of Jesus. And you’re protected by the breastplate of righteousness, because you wear Christ’s righteousness, not your own. And your shoes are the readiness given by the Gospel of peace, because you know you’re forgiven and at peace with God; which means that if your time here on earth ended today, you’re ready to stand before the Almighty. And you carry the shield of faith by which you extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one. The devil keeps hurling accusations saying, *“You’re still a sinner who deserves hell.”* By faith, you say, *“That’s true, but Jesus took away my sins and shared His victory with me. I have life and heaven!”* And you wear the helmet of salvation, because heaven is yours. Finally, you carry the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. As you are attacked by these enemies, you speak God’s Word of Christ’s victory for you. That’s how you stand firm in the battle, you put on the armor of God. You put on Christ.

But, how do you put on Christ? Paul tells us 2 chapters earlier, ***“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Galatians 3: 27)*** At your baptism, Christ gave you forgiveness and clothed you in His righteousness. No matter how old you were when you were baptized, Jesus declared, ***“Satan, sin, death, you’re on notice: this one now belongs to Me.”*** That’s why I love baptizing babies, because it’s in their helplessness that we declare that it’s Jesus who does all the fighting.

But it also puts the battle in perspective. As one who is baptized, the victory is already yours. So, the battle isn’t about you trying to beat sin, death and devil, but about them trying to tempt you to give up the victory you already have in Jesus. It’s no wonder that Paul’s description of the armor of God is all about defense, because you don’t have to win anything. Just, hold onto the victory He’s already given you. That’s what it means to live in your baptism. It means to live a life of daily repentance saying, *“I can’t win the battle, but by His death and resurrection Jesus has won it for me!”* And then daily do what Christians do: pray, serve, work, love, and fight all those other battles in life as if you’ve already won, because in Christ, you already have. Amen.