

Brace For Impact!

I'm sure everyone has heard the story and seen the pictures of US Airways Flight 1549 resting in the Hudson. It was to say the least a dramatic landing and it provided a moment of good news for our nation in the midst of a whole lot of economic bad news.

In case you missed the story, the details of which continue to be presented, let me read an account written by an Associated Press Writer, David Caruso, titled *5 White-knuckled Minutes Aboard Flight 1549*.

Captain Sullenberger's command has been running through my mind and my spirit for the past few weeks. "Brace for Impact!" I looked up the word "brace" in the dictionary. Webster's definition reads, **"to strengthen or make firm by supporting the weight of, resisting the pressure of; to prop up; to make ready for an impact, shock, etc."**

"Resisting the pressure of; to make ready for an impact." I think that is good advice. In fact, I think that is biblical advice. I think that is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when, moved by the Holy Spirit, he wrote this extraordinary passage found in the New Testament letter of Ephesians. Turn with me to Ephesians 6:10 and let's look together at this passage of Scripture. **"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 power 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...." Ephesians 6:10-14**

I love this letter to the church in Ephesus. Paul deals with powerful theological truths and practical spiritual applications. He opens the letter with a masterful explanation of the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ. He tells us how we have been made alive in Christ and seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that we have been made one in Christ, fellow citizens of heaven and members of God's household and family. He speaks of the power of the gospel and prays that we will be able to know the love of Christ, that love that passes knowledge and understanding. It is that

love that transforms us and enables us then to be one in the body of Christ. We grow up together as part of his body. We live as children of God, children of the light. We are to be imitators of God, loving one another, loving our spouse, loving our children and our parents, obeying those in authority over us. He describes for us a new creation living out this life of faith.

And then, suddenly, unexpectedly, it seems almost out of place, Paul issues this warning:

Brace for impact! Get ready, get prepared so you can resist the pressure that will come upon you. Brace yourself so you will be ready for the impact that comes in the evil days.

Like Captain Sullenberger and the crew of 1549, it was just another day, a routine flight, no problems expected, but they were prepared for what could happen. Paul tells us how to live our lives in faith, prepared to resist the pressure from the enemy and our culture, prepared for the impact of evil days and the attack of the evil one. Brace for impact! How? What do we do to brace for impact? What do we do to prepare ourselves? Paul gives us some important instruction.

First of all, **Don't let the impact take you by surprise.** I have to be cautious here, because I don't want anyone to think I go around expecting birds to fly into the jet engines on the planes I'm flying on or that I'm anticipating bad things to happen to me or my family. I am convinced of God's goodness, his faithfulness, his grace that covers me and his mercy that overshadows and follows me every day of my life. I am so blessed. Paul spent five chapters telling us of the blessings of God that have been provided for us through Christ Jesus.

I believe God loves me because I believe God's word. But if I believe God's word, then I know that, as Oral Roberts used to say, "God is a good God and the devil is a bad devil." I believe in God and I believe he has given me these good gifts and access to every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus. But by the very fact that I believe God has given me these good gifts and that God wants me to live this life of faith, I have to believe that the devil wants to steal those gifts from me and to thwart every purpose of God for my life. If God wants me to experience all that Paul speaks of in the first five chapters of Ephesians, then I can rest assured that the devil wants to deny me

of all those things. If God wants me to be seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, then the devil wants me to have my heart and mind fixed on earthly and sinful things. If God wants the walls to be broken down between God's people and races, then the devil wants the walls to be built back up. If God wants my relationship with my spouse to reflect the relationship between Christ and the church, then the devil wants to break up my marriage.

Paul refers to the devil's schemes. He is doing everything he can, conniving and scheming, to disrupt God's plans. I actually don't think the devil cares all that much about you or me. He just wants to hurt us because he knows when we hurt, God hurts with us. He wants to defeat us because God has already ordained and secured our victory and triumph through Christ. He wants to destroy us because he knows he can get to the Father through his children.

Understanding that there is a real devil who is scheming to defeat us, what are we going to do? We are going to prepare ourselves. We are going to brace for impact. The Apostle Paul said, "Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." The word translated "finally" could actually be more accurately translated as "henceforward" or "for the remaining time." The idea is that from now on, until the Lord comes, we will need to remain prepared for battle. From now on, until the Lord comes, we will need to put on the full armor of God so we can stand and not fall. From now on, until the Lord comes, we will need to be alert to the schemes of the devil and not be tripped up by his cunning. And from now on we must **Recognize the source of our strength.**

Apart from Christ and his mighty power, we are no match for the devil and his tricks. We lack the strength and power necessary on our own, but through Christ who strengthens us, we can be victorious. We must recognize and rely upon his strength. King James reads, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." We are commanded to be strong but notice it is only "in the Lord." We brace for impact – we take a stand against the enemy, but it is in the strength and power and might of the Lord and not our own.

Paul has already prayed for us that we could stand in this power. Look back at Ephesians 1: 18. **"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his**

glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be the head, over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” Ephesians 1:18-23.

When Paul tells us in chapter 6 to be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, he uses the same Greek words that he uses in Ephesians 1. This is the same power and might and strength that God used in raising Jesus from the dead. That is the power we are relying upon. It is resurrection power. It is the power to make your dead heart and will come alive to Christ. It is the power and might that raised Christ from the dead that enables you to make those choices that are pleasing to God - that enables you to say no to the devil and yes to God's purpose and plan.

John Stott writes, “Only the power of God can defend and deliver us from the might, the evil and the craft of the devil. True, the principalities and powers are strong, but the power of God is stronger. It is his power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead and enthroned him in the heavenly places, and which has raised us from the death of sin and enthroned us with Christ. True, it is in those same heavenly places, in that same unseen world, that the principalities and powers are working (verse 12). But they were defeated at the cross and are now under Christ's feet and ours. So the invisible world in which they attack us and we defend ourselves is the very world in which Christ reigns over them and we reign with him.”

It is the resurrection power of Christ in which we stand today. You talk about overcoming power! We must not underestimate the power and cunning of our enemy. We are to be alert and aware - we brace ourselves for impact - we put on the armor of God - we know we are engaged in hand to hand combat - but we also know we stand in the might and strength and resurrection power of God and we will not be defeated. Stand in the power of his might! Recognize the source of your strength.

Recognize the responsibility we have. We are reliant upon his strength, might

and power, but Paul told us to “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” We have a responsibility in this battle in which we are now engaged. When Captain Sullenberger told the passengers and crew to brace for impact, there was something they had to do. He landed the plane, but they had to prepare for the crash and then get out of the plane. For the passengers to just sit in their seats after the landing, waiting on the crew to pick them up and carry them out of the plane would be ridiculous and likely impossible. The passengers were responsible to climb out of the plane or stay on board and risk death by drowning. There is something they had to do and there is something we have to do as well. We prepare and brace for impact and we put on the armor and take our stand. We are participants in this battle.

Notice how Paul worded it. It is the Lord’s strength and might and power, but we must put on the armor of God. It is his armor, but we have to put it on and take the stand against the devil’s schemes. We are arming ourselves and we are taking a stand. We have his strength and we have our responsibility. The two go hand in hand.

Do you understand? He has delivered us from sin by his death upon the cross, but we must stand in that deliverance by refusing to yield to the temptation of sin. He enables us to stand in the power of his might, but we must put on the armor, we must plant our feet and we must lift our sword and swing it at the enemy.

The Lord gave me a vision once. I saw an evil spirit coming at me to attack me. He came closer and closer and I was asking “Lord, why aren’t you doing something to protect me? Aren’t you going to help me?” The Lord showed me he had given me armor and a sword and I was to use it. In the vision I realized I had a sword and when I lifted it up, suddenly there was a beautiful angel that appeared to help me and he instantly defeated the evil spirit that had come against me.

We have a sword which Paul tells us in v17 is the word of God. With the shield of faith and the word of God we can overcome the attacks of the enemy. We have the power through Jesus Christ. We have the sword but we must use it. We have the armor but we must take a stand. We must determine in our hearts and minds and in our spirit that we will not be defeated. We will brace for impact and we will overcome all the attacks of the enemy.

I want to wrap this up this morning but let me quickly say a word about this power. For the new believers at Ephesus, this idea of standing strong in the power of the Lord was something new. They were very much acquainted with the idea of deities and supernatural powers. The city of Ephesus was famous for its temple and its worship of the goddess Artemis along with a number of other gods and goddesses. You can read about it in Acts 19. They understood about people casting spells and magical formulas perhaps. The Apostle Paul wanted them to realize three things about the power they found in Christ.

1. **God's power is supreme.** Paul made this plain to them in chapter 1. God has power over death and the grave, power over every ruler and authority. He has all power and there is no competitor. There is no one else who compares with the God of the bible.
2. **There is only one way to access this power.** It is not through magic formulas or incantations, it is not through manipulating some god or goddess, it is not through repeating words or mantras, it is through a personal relationship with God through the access provided by the work of Christ on the cross. It is not about using his name, it is about living in relationship with Christ. His power is at work in us because to use Paul's phrase, we are "in Christ." It speaks of the closeness of our relationship. He lives in us and we find our life in him. The power we need to live and to overcome the attacks of the enemy and to walk in faith is found only in that life giving relationship with Christ.
3. **There is a new purpose for divine power.** For the followers of Artemis and other deities, the purpose of power is to control others, to inflict harm or revenge, to serve oneself. But the power made available through Christ is the power to serve God, the power to be like Christ in our life, our actions, our choices and behavior. It is the power to serve others, the power to forgive others and to love others even when they have wronged us. It is the power to stand firm and fast when the enemy tries to defeat us or tempts us to reject God or rebel against his word. It is the power to serve, to love, to trust, to obey, to stand, to persevere, to overcome. He has given us power to be all he has called us to be and to overcome all the attacks of the enemy.

It is time for us to brace for impact. It's getting weird out there in the world. The devil is wreaking havoc in the lives of believers. Brace for impact. Cry out to God and

for the remaining time between now and when Jesus comes back for us, **“...be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power and put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”**

How many of you need his divine power today? How many of you are under an attack and you need the power of God to enable you to stand? How many of you would say you haven’t been doing your part – you haven’t taken responsibility for your part and you want to make a decision to take a stand today?. He will give you the power but you have to put on the armor and take your stand. You have to prepare - to brace for impact. How many of you are willing to accept your responsibility and put on your armor and take up you sword against the enemy? It’s time to brace for impact. It’s time to take a stand.