

Brace For Impact Part 2

We talked last Sunday about US Airways Flight 1549 and their miraculous landing in the Hudson River. I told you then that Captain Sullenberger's command to the passengers, to "Brace for Impact" had been bouncing around in my mind and in my spirit. I believe it is a warning that we must hear and we must heed with regard to our spiritual well being. There is an enemy that wants to defeat and destroy us. He hates us because God loves us and he wants to see us separated forever from God and his love. He intends to use a variety of weapons and tactics to accomplish his purposes and we are given orders to be prepared – always – to brace for impact!

Turn with me to Ephesians 6:10. Last Sunday we focused upon the source of our strength. This morning I want to focus more upon the enemy and his tactics. Let's look again 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 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..." Ephesians 6:10-14**

The apostle Paul warns us that our struggle is not primarily with flesh and blood – it is not with human beings - rather it is with spiritual forces. Paul refers to the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. I don't think I have to try to convince you of the reality of evil in this world or the reality of demonic forces and spiritual wickedness in our society and culture. Just read the news on any given day if you doubt this truth.

The church at Ephesus certainly believed what Paul was telling them because their city was a center for demonic influence and idol worship. Acts 19:12-30 gives us an idea of the spiritual forces and demonic influence that existed in Ephesus.

Paul refers to these spiritual rulers, authorities, principalities and powers. Some bible scholars believe he is referring to a hierarchy within the devils kingdom. Some think this refers to levels of influence in society. What we do know and what we must

recognize is that there is a powerful spiritual kingdom and powerful forces that are at work to destroy the plan and purpose of God and to defeat and destroy his church, his people.

Now when we talk about the devil and his power and influence, we must keep a couple of things in mind. Don't underestimate his cunning and power, but never underestimate God's power and provision either. Understand that the devil has been judged and defeated. Paul told us in Colossians 2:15 that Jesus made a public display of the devil and his powers. He stripped them off and triumphed over them. But also understand that even though the devil knows he is defeated, he has not conceded defeat. He has not yet been bound and cast into the pit and as a consequence, he is still an enemy that can exercise power and influence against God's people.

Jesus referred to the devil as the prince or ruler of this world in John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11 and the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world and all their glory if he would bow down and worship him in Matthew 4:8-9. Paul referred to the devil as the **“ruler of the kingdom of the air ...the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Ephesians 2:1-2.** John wrote **“We know that we are children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.” 1 John 5:19.**

Satan, the devil has been defeated, but he is still holding on to this kingdom and as long as unbelieving and unrepentant men and women are on this planet, he will have a stronghold from which to operate. The whole world is under his power and control and dominion at the moment. The bible says “to whom you yield yourselves to obey, his servants you are.” Romans 6:16.

These forces of evil operate in the realm of the invisible, the spiritual. J.B. Phillips says they are, “Spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. They recognize no code of honor, no Geneva convention but are intent on destroying you and your soul.”

We must not underestimate the devil's power and ability to exert influence, but at the same time, recognize that God alone is omnipotent. The devil doesn't exercise all power. God does. Only God is omnipotent. Only God is omnipresent. The devil can't be everywhere at once, that's why he uses demonic influence, but God is everywhere at the same time. Only God is omniscient, he knows everything about everything and

everyone. The devil isn't all knowing and no doubt is continually surprised at the gracious plans and purposes of God. Don't underestimate the devil but never ever underestimate the power of God.

Paul says we are wrestling against these spiritual forces. This is not computer guided warfare, firing missiles from the safety of the sanctuary, this is in the trenches, in your face, clawing and fighting, no rules and to the death, hand to hand warfare.

The battle is on and Paul warns us to be prepared and to brace for the impact. We are engaged in this combat everyday but there are times when it is even more intense. There are times when we are more susceptible to certain attacks, more vulnerable to certain tactics and strategy of the enemy. This is why we are to be aware of his schemes, put on the armor of God and then stand in the strength of the Lord and the power of his might. We must never let down our guard where the devil is concerned. Look for a moment at the tactics and schemes of the devil.

Satan is the tempter. It was Satan that tempted Eve and then Adam in the Garden of Eden. It was Satan that tempted Jesus in the wilderness and it is the forces of Satan that tempt us now. Paul refers to the devil in 1 Thessalonians 3:5 as "the tempter."

The book of James helps us understand temptation when he tells us we are all tempted by our own evil desire. The forces of hell know to play to our own evil desire - our own lustful flesh. The enemy doesn't have to do much since we entertain ourselves with all kinds of wickedness, violence and evil. The devil stands behind us and tempts us with something we've already willingly set in front of us. "Look at that. Don't you want that? Don't you need that?" And our own flesh, our own lust moves us to yield to that temptation and to give in to sin. The Bible tells us to flee from temptation. When you turn around, turning away from the temptation in order to run from it, you will likely be facing the devil who has been whispering in your ear. The bible says to resist the devil and he will flee from you. You can win over temptation through the power of Christ. But be aware of who is behind the temptation. Flee the tempter and his temptation. Don't put yourself in its path.

Satan is the accuser. The bible refers to the devil as "...the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night." **Revelation 12:10.**

The devil wants to remind us of our sin and accuses us before God, telling him that we are unworthy of his mercy and love.

Keep in mind that the devil accuses us, hoping to destroy our fellowship with God. Many of us struggle with guilt from our past mistakes. We've repented and confessed our sins to the Lord, asking for his forgiveness, but the devil keeps throwing our sins back in our face. Our own conscience and sense of regret punishes and condemns us and then we start thinking that perhaps God hasn't forgiven us after all. We condemn ourselves and feel separated from God. Remember: The devil accuses us, wanting to separate us from God. The Holy Spirit doesn't accuse us, rather He convicts us. What is he trying to do? He is trying to restore and then maintain our fellowship with God. It is the Holy Spirit that convicts, showing us of our sin and our errors and calling us to repentance and faith in Christ. When we repent and turn away from our sin, we are truly forgiven through Christ. The bible says "therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

Satan is the accuser and Revelation 12:10 reminds us that the only way to overcome the accuser is by the blood of Jesus Christ. **"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." Revelation 12:10.** We are saved by his grace that was provided through his death upon the cross. We overcome the enemy by the blood of Christ the Lamb of God. We are saved by grace through faith. I've quoted this often to you, **"Well may the accuser roar of ills that I have done; I know them all and thousands more, Jehovah knoweth none!"**

Satan is the deceiver. Revelation 12 describes the devil as the one who has deceived the whole world and led it astray. Realize he started his attempt to destroy man's relationship with God by deceiving Eve. He appeared as a serpent and called God's honesty into question. "Did God really say that? You won't really die. This fruit will open your eyes. True knowledge and enlightenment is just ahead." He will deceive you and convince you that God can't be trusted. He will make you doubt your relationship with God.

The Bible warns about the devil's tricks of deception. Paul writes, **"And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:14**. We must keep up our guard, remain prepared, know what God's word says and

remain rooted in God's word.

Satan is the seducer. That same word that is translated as deceived or led astray is also translated as seduced. The devil is doing his best to seduce the world into following him. He seduces us with promises of pleasure and comfort and ease, he mesmerizes us with music and media and celebrity, he lures us with false hopes and pipe dreams. Jesus called him a liar and the father of lies. Everything the devil shows us is an illusion, it's been photo-shopped, air brushed, computer generated. It isn't real. It's hell's glamour shots. John wrote, **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever."** 1 John 2:15-17

Satan seduces you with offers that will not last. All he offers is earthbound, fleshly, temporary. Jesus offers us hope and salvation and eternal life.

I'm concerned about how easily we've been seduced and lured into following the devil, conforming to this world instead of taking our stand in the power of Christ and resisting the devil. It's not just the young, the naive, the innocent, it's all of us. It's a whole culture. God calls us to holiness and righteousness and passionate pursuit of Christ and instead we allow ourselves to be seduced by the glitter and glamour of this world. Instead of a passionate pursuit of his presence, we follow the lust of our eyes and our sinful cravings. We miss the richest blessings of God because we are in love with the world. It's easier to brace for impact than for seduction. Be aware of his schemes and stand in the power of Christ, refusing to be seduced by the world, by your flesh or by the devil.

Satan is the devourer. The bible portrays the devil as a roaring lion and as a dragon. He comes seeking to devour and destroy us, to utterly consume us if he can. Jesus called the devil a thief and said **"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."** John 10:10. The devil doesn't play nice. He plays for keeps. He plays for eternity. He doesn't just plan to wound you, he plans to devour you.

Peter writes, **“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...” 1 Peter 5:8-9**

Resist him, standing firm in the faith. What does our text tell us? **“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.”**

I’m concerned that the devil’s schemes are so subtle, so steady, so continual and unrelenting, that he has worn us down. We have become so accustomed to the filth and the wickedness and the immorality and the sin that we don’t even notice what is happening to us.

Are we susceptible to sin and deception and being devoured? Yes. It’s why Paul is warning us. It’s happening. So be alert. Wake up. Brace for impact. Get ready. Be strong in the Lord. Stand firm in the Lord. Put on the full armor of God.

Think about this for a moment. Adam and Eve had a relationship with God like no one else. He called to them, spoke to them audibly, walked in the garden in the cool of the day with them. They were more intelligent and wiser than us, they were more spiritually attuned and aware than us, and there was nothing to separate them from God because they hadn’t sinned and yet they fell. And the devil appears to have had an easy time seducing them and convincing them to rebel against God’s command.

Adam fell. If they couldn’t stand against the enemy, what makes me think we can? We have something Adam didn’t have. We have the power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We overcome the enemy by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. Through Christ we are more than conquerors.

Martin Luther wrote the great hymn “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.”

**“A Mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing;
Our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing:
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate
On earth is not his equal.**

“Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing;

**Were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name, From age to age the same,
And he must win the battle."**

**And though this world with devils filled, should threaten to undo us;
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us:
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.**

**That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth:
let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill; God's truth abideth still,
His kingdom is for ever."**

It is not in our strength but in the power and might of the Lord that we take our stand. We know the devil is looking to deceive us, but aware of his schemes we will not fall victim, instead we will stand fast. Dig in, brace for impact. Do whatever it takes to insure that you will not become another victim of Satan's tactics. You don't have to fail. You don't have to yield to temptation or give in to sin. God has willed his truth to triumph through us and he will win the battle as long as we stand firm in His power and might.