

“Spiritual Fight”

22 August 2021
At York Pines United Church
York United Ministries
Rev. Andrew K. Lee

Prayer for Illumination

Lord Jesus Christ, as we hear the reading of the Holy Scripture, speak to us your words of spirit and life.

Scripture Reading

Ephesians 6:10-20

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. ¹⁵ As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. ¹⁹ Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, ²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

One: This is the witness of Jesus Christ

All: Thanks be to God.

<Children's Time>

Hello, my friends! How are you doing? What a sticky summer! Another strange summer has arrived! I hope you are enjoying the summer break and preparing for your new school year. Today we read the Bible, and the story sounds a little weird. Actually, the speaker was the Apostle Paul. He wrote so many letters to the early Christians after Jesus' resurrection. Paul was one of the most energetic people who travelled to evangelize people. One day, Christians in Ephesus were so disappointed and discouraged by the Roman persecution. They were just getting tired of living as Christians. So Paul decided to write a letter to them to encourage. Paul says: "Hello my Christian friends! I'm bold to say! We are surrounded by the enemy. The enemy surrounds us, but we are not going to succumb to them. 'Hoot!' Stand firm together! Take up the armour! Fasten the belt around your waist, and put on the breastplate. Wear shoes to fight. Take the shield to protect you from arrows! Is it with you? 'Hoot!' Take your helmet and sword! Are you ready?" "Hoot, hoot, hoot!"



If we draw a picture from his description, it would look like this. Yes, he has his armour. And he is smiling. I'll tell you about it later.

Now, why did the Apostle Paul ask them to get the armour? What's happening to the Christians in Ephesus? Are they going to wage war? Yes, they are having a war, and no, they are not having a physical war but a spiritual war. So, when speaking of the armour, the Apostle Paul is talking about spiritual armour, such as the belt of truth, the breastplate of justice, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Holy Spirit, those are all about the daily preparation and drills. It is necessary to have them as the children of God. And you are getting these items one by one.

But these Christian items can't be purchased with a visa or master card, like game items. We can get them from God through our daily training. Every good Christian has these items, and you also will be equipped. Now can you guess why he smiles? Because he has all the items, and now he has enough power to defeat the enemy.

I'll add a very important thing. At the end of the description of the armour, Paul repeatedly asks one thing: "Pray in the spirit at all times!" My friends, we, Christians, pray to God with our sincere hearts. So, as the Apostle Paul teaches, let's have these items of truth, justice, faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit, and let's pray every day to God, giving our hearts. God bless you, my friends!

<Reflection>

Good morning everyone! It's good to see you again here at York Pines as we resumed Sunday worship service. We all appreciate what our churches are doing to prepare for the on-site worships. Thank you all, and thank you for everyone's co-operation. I hope we can do every Sunday worship service at our own sanctuaries in the near future. For going back to normalcy, we must be prepared in every aspect, and this is like preparation for a battlefield.



As to war and battle, I have an interesting teaching from Sun Tzu, who was born in B.C.544 in China. He writes about the golden rules of war in his world-famous book, *The Art of War*(孫子兵法).¹ In chapter 3 "Attack By Stratagem" unit 18, it says that "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the

¹ The most recent translation is by Lionel Giles in 2018.

result of a hundred battles(知彼知己 百戰不殆). If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained, you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle."² Is this explanation understandable and agreeable? I don't think the Apostle Paul, the writer of Ephesians, knew this, and yet they share common parts when Paul sees themselves as the soldiers on the battlefield. It would be safe to say this battle is spiritual. The armors he is holding are: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes to proclaim the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Taking up the whole armour looks somewhat heavy. But, first of all, they are not physically heavy because, of course, they are metaphysical armour. And they are indeed needed in the spiritual battlefield. Without praying, without knowing God's Word, without living out the Word, who can say that "I am Christian"? Thanks to human nature, we are incomplete; that is, we cannot pray perfectly; we cannot know all the wisdom and knowledge of the Bible. However, we need to confirm the following two things: No 1. We are in the middle of a spiritual fight. And No. 2. We have the will to fight.

Let me add something to No. 1. I mentioned that we are in the middle of a spiritual fight. Actually, we are pacifists and don't want to fight. We've been educated to pursue peace and well-being but avoid fights. We all know that people are looking for inner peace through religions in the world, including Christianity, celebrating divine presence, love, and joy. Those words of peace, love, and joy are key elements that we share in Christianity. I'm not undermining the values. My point is, people under the divine wings are also exposed to vicious evil power. If I should name some of the evil

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicahagy/2013/10/08/sun-tzus-the-art-of-war-illustrated-chapter-3/?sh=4d367ef04fce>; accessed of 19 Aug.21.

power, then I would say they are human greed, lust, violence, discrimination, inhumane economic injustice, degradation of ecosystem and nature, etc. We humans are so vulnerable to be attracted by unjust and sinful temptations. In that sense, we are completely exposed to evil power throughout our everyday life. Does it make sense to you? Yes, we are exposed to the evil powers, and the Apostle Paul describes that we are in the center of spiritual battle.

The second point is that we are here, we gather at the house of prayer to confirm that we are resisting the evil. In other words, we have the will to fight, will to resist, and will to follow Jesus Christ throughout our lives and beyond. If you want to follow the world only, then you don't have to be here. But you are here because you are confirming that you are willing to follow Jesus and resist the evil.

The matter of possessing the will to fight is very important. Nowadays, I'm studying the Canadian Armed Forces manuals. It says at least three things are crucial to win the war: Leadership, training, and will to fight. I think these are true to our spiritual fight. Leadership – we don't have to worry. We have a supreme leader, the triune Jesus Christ. Training – yes, we are somewhat shaky, but I believe all in all we are doing good because we are practicing and tasting the Kingdom of God on the earth through the Christian life. And the last one: Will to fight. Without the will to fight, no one can win the war. In the case of Afghanistan that we have been informed of since last week, military experts say that the army and the government of Afghanistan have continually been corrupted and have lost their will to fight. In spite of the support of the US troops and the world, including Canada, the war can't be won when their own army and government don't have the will to fight with proper training.

Having the will to fight the spiritual fight for us is not insufficient. This is because we are here, supporting and standing with God's command. We are weak, but at the same time, we are strong because we celebrate God's presence altogether and encourage each other.

I'm repeating the teaching from Sun Tzu: "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."

Sisters and brothers! Who is our enemy, and who are we? Our enemy is an invisible evil power, and we know their names. And we are the children of God. We are here with good wills. And we have the strong leadership of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when we know that we are in the middle of a spiritual fight, and we agree to train, encouraging each other for the will to fight, our spiritual fight cannot be defeated. We are weak, we have flaws, we are incomplete, and we sometimes fail. But we know that we won the battle, and we will win the war, and we will join the ultimate victory because God is with us. Don't be afraid. All we have to do is walk altogether with Jesus Christ every day. Let us pray silently, confirming our heart is with Jesus Christ, our Lord.