

Warfare

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Date: 02 August 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Now please turn back if you will to Mark chapter one of the two passages that we read. I'm going to focus on the one in Mark chapter one.

And as I said, the subject, if you like, is this whole idea of, well, the act that Jesus does of casting out a demon. Now the title that was given to the sermon this morning is Warfare.

Warfare. Because we're talking in many ways about a bigger situation that's going on here. Jesus, this, don't think about these miracles as just isolated, vaguely interesting acts that Jesus does that have a significance for a short time and then he kind of moves on and does something else.

And really the significance is only in the act of what he does. There's a much bigger picture here. As we talk about the miracles, we're talking about Jesus, the King, who comes to his creation and all that he does, all that he teaches with such power is backed up if you like by what he does.

And these miracles are evidence of his power as he comes as the King. And the warfare that we speak of is, again, part of this bigger battle that goes on in the heavenly realms.

[1 : 1 6] This spiritual warfare that existed, the Bible describes, and that it never hides away from. It describes almost from page one, right the way through, all that it talks about.

Warfare, I'd like to suggest right at the start, is something that is common to every one of you. Everybody in humanity, to some degree or other, knows something about warfare.

Now I know that there are people in the world right now for whom that's a very, very real thing and they live in constant fear that they and their children will be killed by falling bombs and we give thanks to God that that is not our experience this morning.

But then nevertheless, you experience warfare in a relational kind with people, sometimes more than other times.

People who maybe war against you if you like, who hate you and who treat you as if they hate you. You experience war if you like in your heart, in your soul, you will know something of the battle against yourself as you battle with sin.

[2 : 1 9] You will know something of the battle of the way you feel towards other people or sometimes they're just the worst people in the world to you and you struggle so much with others.

So we're talking about warfare as something that can be very overt and physical and bloody and violent and which causes death. But we also know something of warfare as something that rips up our heart and that makes us as human beings go through the greatest sense of turmoil in different ways, different ways.

We all know that in different ways. But that comes from this bigger warfare that I mentioned, this spiritual warfare. The root of sin in our hearts is there.

But we know that the Bible is described again right from the start, how the devil describes this fallen angel who rebelled against his Creator God, whose act was one of jealousy, wanting the position of God and who led other angels who fell with him to war against God.

That's the reality the Bible describes that to many people nowadays sounds like nonsense. But we don't shy away from that. It's the Bible's teaching and it explains and underpins the reality that we see and feel which is this very overt but also very heartfelt warfare that we deal with on a daily basis.

[3 : 45] So that's the set of the scene. And I want to look at three things this morning. And the first is just to elaborate on that a little bit. Before we come to look at this act that Jesus does, I just want to kind of look at the bigger picture for a little while.

So we're going to look at the big picture. Then we're going to zoom in on this act that Jesus does. And then the third thing that we're going to do is we're going to come back out again and we're going to ask how do we make sense of this issue?

How do we deal with this? What might seem like a strange or a confusing thing, particularly in the context that we live, which says that we're rational beings and that we've got no time for this kind of talk, how do we deal with this?

First point then is just to elaborate on this a little bit more. The war in heaven. What can we say about this just by means of setting the scene? The war in heaven. Well, I want to read the verse just in Ephesians, just as we start.

Ephesians chapter six. Very important verse and it says this. 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.

[4 : 56] Now, isn't that quite a verse? Isn't that quite a verse? That's saying again, that's re-emphasizing the point I've just made, that the real battle underlying who we are as people, as human beings, isn't just our nature or our impulses and it isn't other people who get in your way and who stop you trying to live the life that you want to live, but this is underlying spiritual battle which affects me and you now today in our very rational 21st century world.

And then we can say a few things about that just in starting. The first thing I want to say is that it's personal. Okay? Because that verse there that I read in Ephesians, it talks about the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world.

That's personal. We're talking about beings in this situation here. We're talking about beings against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Now that's not to say, in contrast to some other ideas you may hear, that this is some kind of impersonal spiritual force, a general sense of badness as opposed to a general sense of goodness.

And we have to just find the goodness and steer clear of the badness. Some people have this idea that we as moral beings can tap into good and bad, but it's very impersonal.

You know, in different cultures they'll talk about things like yin and yang and as you explore all of these things they're impersonal and that's different, fundamentally different to what the Bible describes.

[6 : 33] And because of that then that's quite a challenging thing isn't it? To say that you believe as you read the Bible and all that it teaches, it describes personal beings, created beings who have rebelled against their maker God and whose mission is now to be against him.

That's their desire. That's what they do. They are against their maker. They're against God. And all of what they want to do is to take other people with them against God and to move against him.

They're personal beings. So we're not talking about an impersonal force. We're talking about Satan and his angels who fell and who rebel against God. They're created beings. They're created.

They were made by God and they fell. And in John's Gospel chapter 8, Satan is described in this way. He's described as the father of lies.

The father of lies. So these are personal beings and their characteristic is malevolent because they lie.

[7 : 40] They're in the garden. What was the, how did Satan approach Eve? Well he immediately questioned. He asked her to question God.

His whole attitude towards her was one of wanting to turn her from trust to distrust, from faith to doubt, from relationship to no relationship.

That was his goal. That was his great act. And so these are personal created beings who are liars, who want to say to people, your God is not so great.

Your God is not the one to follow. Your God is not the one who holds truth. You should question God. You should doubt God. You should go your own way.

Don't listen to God. That's the way in which this war in heaven plays out amongst us on earth. And so the last thing I want to say just in thinking about this bigger picture, this war in heaven is that, and you know this, don't you?

[8 : 52] It's not played out in a visual big dramatic way in front of your faces. It's not obvious. You can't see it. And in many ways that makes it all the more dangerous, right?

So we're not talking here about some great thing that we see flashing things in the sky as angels battle one another. We're not talking about being able to see nasty little demons who run around amongst us.

Many people would think that's what we believe as Christians, that we have these creatures who look scary and have horns on their heads. But it's much more subtle than that.

It's an invisible spiritual warfare. And it affects us very subtly because what the devil tried and succeeded in doing to Eve and has done all the way through human history, he still wants to do today.

He still wants to be at work amongst people like you and me, taking our eyes off Jesus and putting them anywhere else and distracting us. That's the spiritual warfare that we face.

[9 : 57] It's very subtle. And so we need to be thoughtful people because the way that that warfare affects us, if the way that the devil works is to question God, well, we need to think about the ways in which our society questions God.

What are the ways in which our society pulls us away from the truth of the Bible, pulls us away from the truth of God and asks us to put our faith somewhere else? Well, I would say things like, the Bible teaches that humanity finds its ultimate fulfillment in God.

That's God's message to you this morning. As somebody who was created by him for his glory, to give glory to him, the message of those who would attack your soul is that so two centuries ago.

You'll be bored by all of that. It's all old hat and everybody thinks it's stupid. Don't go that way. The Bible then teaches us that we operate best as people when we follow God's laws.

That's what the Bible teaches us, that God gave us his ways, his teaching, his laws. And our culture today will say to us, you make up your own truth.

[11 : 17] Nobody gets to tell you ultimate truth. There's good and bad. Sure, but you've got to just kind of work that out yourself, find out your own way of dealing with that. And we really have no right to stand over and above anybody else and tell them how they should be living.

There's certainly no book who can tell us which can tell us that. Don't listen to the Bible. You follow your own truth. And the Bible also tells us as believers, follow Jesus, take up your cross.

Take up your cross daily and follow him. You know, Jesus came as the one who was our Savior. He came as the servant Savior, the suffering servant. And he served and he did that out of love.

And that's the call that the Bible says that is ours also as Christians, with those who are to follow and to serve others. And in many ways, that's a very unglamorous life.

And our culture would say, and we would be led to believe that the greatest thing that we can do is just try and be anything that we want to be. So follow your own heart. Follow your own personal sense of fulfillment.

[12 : 22] And if that means, if Christian messages about self-sacrifice and about putting others first, well, that can be inconvenient. So just put that aside.

Follow your heart. You know, so I'm suggesting that in many ways, the spiritual warfare that we face isn't going to slap you in the face. It's not going to terrify you, but it's going to subtly undercut everything that the Bible will say to you.

And that the Lord Jesus would say to you, and so then we have to be so on our guard, so careful and so aware of that war in heaven.

Now I just want to raise that, as I said, and just open that up as the context, because then as we understand that big picture, I think it helps us when we zoom into the passage that we read just now, and see what happens as Jesus, remember, as I said, the King, the Creator comes to his earth, and he's on the way to the cross.

He's come to be the Savior, and he's on the way to the cross. And as he moves about amongst people, he performs these miracles, one of which, as we see this morning, is to cast out one of these demons.

[13 : 35] So Jesus comes right into the heart of this battle. He comes right face to face with one of these adversaries. So secondly, we've seen the war in heaven, big picture, zoom in now on Mark chapter one.

And the heading I would just give to this is the conquering King. Keep in mind that Jesus is the King. Okay? Let me say two things just as we approach this passage, Mark chapter one.

First is to say that this is a war that's been won. This is a war that has been won. Jesus came as the King, as the servant, and as the greatest way he could serve was to give his life as a ransom for many.

That's the gospel. That's the core message of Christianity. That's what Jesus came to do. In doing that, he won. He triumphed over every evil power, triumphed over Satan, who wanted to make it impossible for people to have a relationship with God.

And by dying on the cross to be the Savior, Jesus made it possible. Jesus opened the way for you to have a relationship with God. Jesus opened the way for you to be saved and to know your Savior and to know redemption and fulfillment as you follow Jesus.

[14 : 58] So Jesus won the war at Calvary. We read that. Let me read one verse. Brilliant verse in Colossians chapter two.

Colossians two, verse 15, having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them. These are these, as it were, these evil powers.

He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. There you have it. Jesus at the cross won this great battle. But as we come to this passage and as we watch Jesus through the gospels on his path, he's winning battles.

He comes up against, on different occasions, some of these evil forces, these evil spirits. And as he does that, he is able to win these incidents, these battles.

And this is what we find this morning. Mark chapter one, verse 22.

[16 : 01] Jesus has been teaching. Okay. Now that, remember, is his primary goal. Jesus moves around teaching about the kingdom. He calls people to himself, calls people to repent for the kingdom of God is near.

He calls people to himself. And as he enters a synagogue, we get into Mark chapter one here. They went to Capernaum. When the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue to teach.

So that's his primary aim. He wants to teach. He wants people to hear his message and to come to him. So picture the scene. Jesus is there to teach. And an extraordinary thing happens because somebody amongst the crowd, all these people are amazed, says that they're amazed at his teaching.

He taught as one who had authority. And then somebody interjects. Somebody cannot remain silent. And that person who can't remain silent is described as a man of verse 23 who was possessed by an evil spirit.

Now, isn't that interesting? That as all these people gather for worship, and as Jesus comes in, now remember, Jesus doesn't necessarily look remarkably different. He doesn't come in wearing a crown.

[17 : 08] Jesus approaches. Jesus begins to teach. This person who is oppressed by an evil spirit is evidently disturbed by the fact that Jesus is there and is teaching.

And he can't remain silent. A man in their synagogue who's possessed by an evil spirit cried out, what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Now you'll notice here, and also in the passage of read Mark 5, there's similarities and patterns that occur. One of which is that in this passage and in the one of Mark 5, the person oppressed by an evil spirit recognizes Jesus and in a sense makes them self-known.

So Jesus doesn't necessarily go hunting out this person. He calls out. He shouts out. And in many ways, he interrupts Jesus' teaching. What do you want with me?

What do you want with us? So there's obviously a threat there for the demon, for the evil spirit. There's a threat there because of who Jesus is and because of his teaching and because of the authority.

[18 : 11] So his teaching is interrupted by this being. Make themselves known. They interrupt the whole thing. And notice what they do.

How they address Jesus. Verse 24, what do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? It's interesting that the spirit names Jesus twice, two different ways. Don't know if you noticed that when we read it.

What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. I know who you are.

Now some people will suggest that that's kind of maybe a technique or a device by which a spirit will try and gain ownership or a degree of control over somebody to name somebody is to know them, to put them in their place, if you like.

But there's no getting away from the fact that the spirit is deeply troubled by the fact that Jesus is there. Senses the threat and the authority of Jesus, the threat and the authority of Jesus.

[19 : 15] And it has to interrupt him and recognizes in the way even that they address him that potential that Jesus has, have you come to destroy us? So this spirit on beholding Jesus recognizes his power, his authority and his ability to deal with them.

And of course that's what happens, isn't it? Jesus simply deals with the situation. There's no great dramatic battle here. There's no spiritual swords out if you like.

There's no great flashing lights or anything like that. What does Jesus do? How does Jesus deal with the situation? Be quiet, Jesus said sternly.

Come out of him. Now a couple of weeks ago I was preaching on healing miracles and one of the things that we noticed there, in fact one of the things you notice whenever Jesus performs miracles is he does so by the power of his word.

Isn't that great? Jesus speaks. The one through whom all things were made, great creator, whose power is to simply speak the universe into being, comes into his creation and is faced by this evil force and is able to simply speak a word and deal with the evil force that confronts him.

[20 : 38] Jesus speaks and the matter is dealt with. And so he shows in his teaching and in the power of his word to perform this miracle, again his power and authority, as the King coming to his creation.

Jesus speaks and it is expelled. It's the same again in Mark chapter 5. Won't go there and read it, but if you were to look at how he deals with that very dramatic situation with somebody who's almost out of their mind in the way that they are oppressed by this legion of demons, Jesus again is able to simply say to this legion, what is your name and then again come out.

And he has complete authority over these forces. Now having looked briefly at this little section here, just to know a couple of things about the way it happens, you may be sitting out this morning thinking, well this sounds interesting, but a little bit crazy.

You may know a lot of people who say, well the Bible's not really describing evil spirits, it's being talked about here as illness, some form of maybe mental illness or something like that.

But actually the Bible distinguishes between illness and evil spirits. So make that distinction because the Bible does, that's quite an important distinction to make.

[21 : 59] There are times in which it describes Jesus dealing with what seems to be a demon, an evil spirit and that's as in the case here. Be very clear in your mind about the power of Jesus.

We've mentioned that already briefly. The demon has limits. If you cast your mind back, we're going to be studying after the summer the book of Job.

Cast your mind back to the kind of prelude to the book of Job and it describes Satan coming, it's an incredible fascinating passage where Satan as it were has an audience with God.

Satan presents himself before the throne room of God and the point of that is that his power does not trump the almighty God's power. He comes and has to subject himself before God.

And so here a demon like this who has a degree of influence over a man like the man who's oppressed here, when he comes face to face with Jesus, he's silenced.

[23 : 02] Jesus is a powerful one. But also I want you to notice finally just from this little passage, look at what Jesus does for this man. Now this is really important.

This is really important for us to understand as people, as human beings who feel often, I don't know if you feel this very keenly or not, the spiritual battle that goes on within you, the temptations that you face and the trials and the difficulties and the struggle with the sense of sin.

And even just difficulty, oppression, badness that you feel in life generally. What does Jesus do for this man? He sets him free from oppression.

What does Jesus do for the man who's so horribly afflicted in Mark chapter 5, the man who's all alone living in a graveyard, cutting himself and screaming out in despair?

He sets him free. He makes him in his right mind. He makes him go back amongst his community. He gives him back his life and he gives him good gospel news to go and tell other people.

[24 : 12] Jesus does good for people. This is the effect of the king as he comes to the world and the way in which he's able to deal with people. So this man, this passage in many ways doesn't describe him very much.

We simply know that he's oppressed by a spirit. Exactly what I looked like. We don't know. We don't know a lot more about this. But obviously it wasn't good news for him. And particularly spiritually speaking, he was in a very bad place and he's set free.

He's set free from that by Jesus. And so what Jesus does is he restores. Now that is the work of Jesus then and now. That is always the work of Jesus.

We are always going to face the spiritual warfare, the torment of our own hearts dealing, battling with the sense of sin that we have. And however, again, I've not really gone into this, the mechanics of how the spiritual warfare works a lot of the time except to say that we are buffeted by spiritual oppression at times.

He has always come in order that we might be set free, that we might turn from a life of oppression and sin and darkness and dead ends and turn to him and be saved and follow in the light.

[25 : 33] In other words, live how we were made to be. He comes to set us free to live that life. And so this king comes as a conquering king.

In the middle of all this understanding about spiritual warfare and battle, Jesus is the conquering king. Okay, finally and briefly, just a little bit more about how to deal with all of this.

How do we process, how do we go away from church this morning and make a bit more meaning of this sort of subject?

I want to quote C.S. Lewis briefly. He says something very helpful I think about the whole area of spiritual warfare. If we zoom back out and consider this, for ourselves nowadays in the 21st century, how do we think about, how do we process and deal with this question?

Well, C.S. Lewis said this, humanity falls into two equal and opposite errors concerning the devil. So he's speaking very broadly about the devil and his influence.

[26 : 35] Either they take him altogether too seriously or they do not take him seriously enough. I find that very helpful. Either we can take this whole area of the devil who he is and how he works and what he does really, really too seriously or not seriously enough.

And that's what I want to do just in finishing. Look at those two polar extremes. Let's make sure that we're not in either of those two polar extremes. Okay? First of all, not taking him seriously enough.

So in other words, complacency. You might have never thought about the whole area of spiritual attack. You may be a believer this morning and hardly ever think about it.

And it's important not to be complacent about this. How do we deal with complacency or not really thinking much about this issue? I think the answer is to go back to, remember at the start, I read from Ephesians chapter six, go back to Ephesians chapter six and read that last section in Ephesians chapter six about the armor of God in its context.

It's really important to remember, I don't know if you're very familiar with, I feel like I grew up in the church learning about the armor of God and all of that and it became quite familiar to me, that imagery that we get in Ephesians chapter six of the armor of God.

[27 : 46] Why does it, why does Paul write about the importance of putting on the armor of God? Well, it's because as we read at the start, that verse, that whole section is prefaced by Paul saying our struggle isn't against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, the authorities and the powers in this dark world.

Because we face this battle, put on the armor of God. In other words, the first thing that we need to do if we're complacent about the spiritual warfare that we face is recognize the battle.

Just recognize it, know it, know that it's there and know that it's something that is real and that we face. Ephesians chapter six, verse 11, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

See that's why we've to put on the full armor of God, because we face this warfare. So recognize the battle that you have. Often I think we maybe think about passages like Ephesians chapter six, the armor of God.

Well, that's because life's difficult and because I can get quite weak when I struggle in the Christian life. Well, actually Paul says it's because you have a much bigger battle to fight. That's the first thing, is just recognize the battle and know it.

[29 : 03] And then the other flip side that C.S. Lewis is talking about is taking the devil all together too seriously. Now I think what he means by that is having a sense of paralysis or fear.

I think sometimes we can get into the danger of becoming almost obsessed with maybe unhelpful details about this whole subject. And we start thinking more about Satan, more about the battles that we face or the demons or what that looks like and all the mechanics of it.

And we take our eyes off Jesus our Savior, who's the one who saved us from that influence and who's the one who sets us free. And I think the advice that C.S. Lewis is trying to give here and I think sensible and very biblical advice is recognize the battle, know the enemy, but know that that enemy is defeated and therefore go on in confidence and in faith and live your Christian life.

Don't get caught up and be paralysed by a sense of fear about the enemy that you face. Again in Ephesians chapter 6, what is the advice that we're given here?

How do we deal with this and move on in the Christian life? It says in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 16, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

[30 : 25] Now the shield of faith, what does that mean? That means believe that the conquering king has won the battle.

Know that there is a war, but know that the enemy is defeated. Know that your Savior is sufficient and has fought for you and has won. And so this morning the enemy that fights against you is a defeated one and does not have power over your Savior.

Your Savior is mighty. So that's the first thing, the shield of faith. And the second thing, verse 17 says this, take the helmet of salvation of the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

The sword of the spirit which is the word of God. How did Jesus deal with the temptation that he faced when he was in the wilderness? You remember the early in his ministry, he'd been baptized and then almost the first thing that God allows for him to go through is to be cast out into the wilderness where he's tempted and assaulted by the devil.

How does Jesus deal with that? He does this, he uses the word of God. The sword of the spirit which is the word of God. Jesus knows and speaks the word of God.

[31 : 39] He speaks the scriptures. He quotes the Bible. He takes the advice of God and he uses that in his temptation. That's really helpful advice for you and me.

So this morning when you leave here and as you face the week ahead, you will still be in a spiritual battle. You will still face oppression and difficulty.

You'll still face the battles of your own heart and the struggle with sin. And one of the great ways that we can deal with that is to take God's word and all that it says to us. And we can know it and we can, if you like, speak it back at all the temptation.

All the ways in which the evil one would try and pull us down. We use his word and we speak the truth. And we do that to each other also to encourage each other when we struggle. Because it goes on to say that as well, doesn't it?

Yeah, and that's a very tangible thing you can do this morning in this passage in Ephesians 6. It ends by saying, pray in the spirit on all occasions, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

[32 : 38] So there's that sense of community, isn't there? Don't think of yourself in isolation. Again, that's one of the, if you like, one of the great lies of our culture is to say that we're all just doing our own little thing.

We face troubles on our own as Christians, but we're a community of believers. And so we speak the word together to encourage one another and we pray for each other. So go home and pray for one another and support one another because the battle's real and because we need each other for the week ahead.

So know the battle, know your enemy, but know that your Savior is victorious. And if you're a believer this morning, then you're safe and you have a great Savior and you have the power of the Spirit and the power of the word and the power of prayer.

And that's good news for us. Let me pray. Lord, we thank you so much for the Gospels and for what they show us of Jesus in his life.

We thank you that he is mighty to save. We thank you that he's able to win battles against evil. And as we think about and process this subject, which can maybe be difficult for us to think about nowadays, we pray that we wouldn't be complacent about it.

[33 : 52] We pray that we wouldn't dismiss it. And we ask that you would help us, Lord, help us to be real about the troubles that we face. Help us to be honest with ourselves, not to keep parts of our life back that we want, but we actually quite like the way that sin can be in our lives sometimes.

Help us instead to turn away from that and to recognize the way that you've called us to live following you. And we pray that we would overcome, that you would be with us and that we would look to you always.

And we pray that the influence of the evil one would be overcome in our city. We see so much trouble and strife and unbelief and despair and brokenness.

And we recognize this makes the evil one happy. We pray against that. Help us to love the light, the love, the gospel of Jesus, to be bold with the gospel of Jesus and to take it out into this dark world.

And in a loving way and in a relevant way and an understandable way to make that gospel known to other people so that they can see Jesus for who he is and that they can follow him.

[35 : 10] Help us, God, we pray. Amen.