

Awake to Spiritual Attack

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 August 2012

Preacher: Tom Muir

- [0 : 0 0] We're going to look tonight for a short while at Ephesians 6, so you may want to have Ephesians 6 open. We're going to think about the theme being alive to spiritual attack tonight, being alive to spiritual attack, particularly from verse 10 onwards in chapter 6.
- I don't know about you, but it's certainly worth my while thinking from time to time about how I can become over familiar with different passages of Scripture. You know, when you hear a passage and you almost, internally, immediately kind of switch off because you're very familiar with it.
- My example would probably be a passage like this. The armor of God. I've heard it, I've read it, I've heard it preached on. I no doubt was taught at lots of times at Sunday school.
- It's really easy for me, maybe it's very easy for you, just to almost not realise yourself switching off because you feel like you're so familiar with a passage like this. The reason, maybe, is I almost kind of, I have a kind of caricature in my head, maybe, but this passage immediately links me back to, I remember the old Sunday school rooms I used to go in when I was a kid.
- And they were filled with banners on the wall and pictures, usually of this kind of thing, of passages like this, passages like the armor of Christ with various pictorial depictions of some of the examples that were given here.
- [1 : 2 9] Now that's really wrong, isn't it? If that's the way I think about a passage like that, that's something that I've really got to work at, that's something that I've got to sort out. Because if I do that, if I get so used to a passage that I just assume that I know everything about it, that I don't need to pay attention when it's read out, then I've almost caricatured it to the point of just neutralising it, so it doesn't really mean anything to me anymore.
- Which is the opposite of what a passage like this should be treated like, because this is an absolutely vital part of Paul's letter. It's well known for a reason, isn't it? It contains a massive degree of spiritual truth, and it's one that we need to hear often.
- Because we can often become complacent about spiritual attack, about the danger that we're in as believers in spiritual things.
- So this passage is a wake-up call, it's a reality check for us as Christians if we get too blasé about the possibility of being under spiritual attack.
- Because it tells us, speaks into your life and says that you are, if you're a Christian, a threat from spiritual forces who want to essentially kill your relationship with God.
- [2 : 5 1] They would be more than happy if you had no more interest, no more time for your Savior Jesus Christ. That's why Paul writes these words.
- We're going to look first of all in a little bit more detail about why these are written. You know, why should we be worried? What's the fuss about that Paul feels the need to write these words?
- And then we're going to look at what we are to do about this, and then we're going to look a little bit briefly at the outcome. So what for? What should we be doing as a result of being protected against the spiritual attack?

But first of all, why? Why are we worried? After all, if you remember back to this morning, indulge me just for a minute, recapping briefly on this morning's service. We were looking back into Ephesians chapter 5 and chapter 3.

The whole point of which is to say to us that we're called to live a life finding out what is pleasing to God. That's what our calling is. And going back into chapter 3, we're to remember that we're saved by God's mercy, which is to motivate us and to inspire us to live this life finding out what God's will is.

[4 : 00] And we're also to remember that we have such a great calling because as we in our lives are transformed so that we want to become more like Jesus, it causes the heavenly hosts to praise their Father, to praise God because they see the work that He is doing in our lives.

So we have this great calling. Paul's been writing about this in this book. How inspiring we might think as we read through this book that it lifts us up and shows us what Paul is saying to us about who we are as people.

So we might ask the question as we come to this last chapter. Why the negative ending? Why so cautious? Why do you have to give so many warnings? You know, we're saved. We have such a great message.

We've got such a great calling to live for the Lord and to show His glory to the watching world and to the watching angels. Well, Paul wants us to remember the reality. He knows the reality and he wants to remind us of the reality.

Look at verse 12. Having said, be strong in the Lord and His mighty power, He goes on to say, 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.

[5 : 24] Interesting, isn't it, that when we saw in this morning in chapter 3 that the angels in heaven, the spiritual forces in the heavenly realms in heaven, rejoice as they see our lives being transformed, as they see us being made more like Jesus.

This passage brings us into the reality of another spiritual force in the heavenly realms, whose desire is for our destruction. Paul wants us to be aware of that.

Not a fashionable thing to talk about at all. It's not something that we maybe feel very easy about. It's not something we maybe want to think about, but Paul draws our attention to it, despite having spent so much of the letter lifting us up and showing us our great calling.

He says, but you have to be careful. You have to be watching over your life, because our struggle is not just, your struggle isn't just against somebody in your work who's annoying you, or somebody in church who's annoying you, or something that you find difficult in life.

There's more to it, your under-spiritual attack. Remind yourself of that. You have to be aware of that. Let's look at a couple of other instances of what the Bible says about this fact.

[6 : 34] Some of the other truths. I'm not going to spend the whole night looking at what these demons look like, sound like. I'm not going to spend the whole night focusing on the devil. But it's important to know, isn't it, what's being talked about here, and why we should be aware of this, and why we should be careful.

You may remember the line from the film. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. I remembered that from the film *The Usual Suspect*.

Apparently, a French poet said it first. I didn't know that until yesterday. The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist. In other words, thinking, ah, surely there's no devil.

It's all just, you know, make-believe. It's really just about what I do and what I don't do, and how I choose to behave and how I choose not to behave. That's what the devil wants.

That line I quoted isn't biblical, but there's a lot of biblical truth behind it. Because we find in, and we just read the verse in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, we have this truth.

[7 : 40] 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 15. In 2 Corinthians 11, verse 15.

Let me read from verse 13. Such men, he's been talking about people who mislead the Christians. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.

And no wonder for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. That's how Satan would have us think about him. As somebody who's not that harmful to us.

We're not really that much of a big deal. And we know that, don't we? Because if you're honest, if you look at the things that would drag you down, the sins, the temptations that you face, how often, if your guard is down, do they seem as things that are not that bad?

They're just things that we like to do. Everybody else is doing them? Why can't we? What's the big problem here? It's not that big a deal. That's the way these spiritual forces would have us think, isn't it?

[8 : 43] Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. In other words, he wants to come to us and show us things that he would say to us are good for us and convince us of the fact. Remember back to the garden and to Adam and Eve?

And to the way that he asked them the question, did God really say, just planting that seed of doubt in their mind? Is it really that big a deal? Surely God wouldn't think it was that important. But the reality, of course, is very different, isn't it?

We have another passage in 1 Peter, let me just read this one verse to you. There are three instances in 1 Peter where Peter says to the people he's writing to, be self-controlled.

There are three very distinct verses throughout the book and he says to them, you've got to be careful, be self-controlled because. And in each instance he gives a different reason for being self-controlled.

And the last of which is in 1 Peter 5. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

[9 : 47] That's the reality. He wants to devour you. Doesn't make for easy reading, doesn't make us feel comfortable at all. And what we're not to do though is to kind of become over consumed by thinking about the devil.

The Bible also tells us that he's not completely free. We know that from the story of Job, don't we? We know the truth that the Lord our God is sovereign.

And the Satan will not be able to do anything. Will not be able to take us beyond anywhere that God our Father does not permit. But nevertheless, what these truths are teaching us is that it is important for us to be aware.

Don't forget the fact that you'll come under spiritual attack. Sometimes when we go highest as Christians and we have a good day and we feel so blessed, we can sometimes let our guard down easiest.

And we forget the danger that can face us. So we have to be aware also of ourselves, don't we? If we're aware of the threat that we face, if we are aware of the spiritual attack that we're under, we also have to know ourselves.

[11 : 02] We have to be aware of the way in which we can individually come under attack. You know that when the devil came to Jesus in the wilderness and he tempted him, he tempted him with what? With power.

Because Jesus is the Son of God. With all that potential power at his disposal, the devil comes to him and says, lifts him up above all the cities of the world and says, see all this, I could give you this.

Of course Jesus rejects him. So we have to think of it, what are we susceptible to? Maybe on a very basic level, we ask ourselves questions like, well, do I have a position in the church?

Am I tempted to think that I'm indispensable? Am I insecure about things in life? Well, am I tempted to find my security outside of Jesus Christ? So the first person that comes along and praises me or says something nice, I'll latch onto them and that's where I'll find my meaning and my security.

Am I well off? Am I tempted to spend it all on myself? Am I good looking? Am I tempted to be vain? Am I just good at something?

[12 : 11] Am I tempted to be proud? Do we know ourselves and do we ask the Lord to speak into our lives and say, Lord, help me know how I am susceptible to attack before I am attacked because I don't want to be attacked.

I don't want to fall. I don't want to sin. Help me to know myself and help me to fight against it. So why should we be worried? Well, because this is a reality.

The reality is that we are, if we're Christians, we're under attack because we've been saved, because the devil does not want us to be saved and he doesn't want us to know the love and the mercy of Jesus changing and transforming our lives.

So then he goes on to talk about what do we do? Having seen why, we have this long and very well-known passage about the armor of God. Now, I'm not going to go through the armor of God verse by verse tonight.

That's not what I want to focus on as much. What I want to do though is recognize the truth of this passage that in each instance Paul is referring to an aspect of our lives, an aspect of spiritual truth where we tap into and we take hold of God's power for us to help us against this attack.

[13 : 26] But this is summarized in verse 10. Look back with me at verse 10, chapter 6 verse 10. There's an absolutely fundamental principle in this verse and we need to know this clearly.

Ephesians 6 verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Now, the following verses are an outworking of this verse, aren't they?

Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. As I mentioned this morning, one of the things that we can be tempted to do when we fall into sin or when we face temptation is to kind of take it all back upon ourselves again and say, ah, I'm rubbish at this, I keep making the same mistakes, must try harder.

Well, that's true because God does want us to try harder. He does want us to work at living in the way that He wants us to live. But if that's all it is, if it's all about us trying harder to resist the devil, then what a weight of pressure we have on ourselves.

And so we're reminded again here, aren't we, that we're strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. So for every instance of temptation, for every instance of struggle and battle, are we doing it in the Lord's power?

[14 : 44] So you look at the examples throughout the following verses. It talks, for example, about the belt of truth buckled around your waist, the belt, the truth of the gospel, the breastplate of righteousness, the righteousness of Christ given to you because of His righteousness.

With your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace, the gospel, the gift of God to you, the shield of faith worked in you by the Holy Spirit, all by God's power working in you to transform you.

And our focus has to be back upon that and the way in which God is working to transform us. And we must cooperate with that. It's not like, you know, we work hard and we resist and we succeed.

And so our prayer and our focus each day is, Lord, I need your help because the battle is great and I face many temptations and I need you to help.

But here's the point. Here's the point at which we maybe forget sometimes. This armour, this defence against the devil's schemes, against the temptations that we face, we must put it on.

[16:02] There's an emphasis here on the fact that God's power is what works in us. But if we've got nothing to do with that in terms of saying, Lord, help me, Lord, protect me, Lord, help me, put this armour on me so that I'm protected, then it's as if we're just kind of walking blindly by all the help that God would offer us.

Remember that Jesus taught us to pray. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. We have to pray that. Father, God, deliver me from temptation.

Help me as I go through this week not to fall into temptation. I need your help. It's about being vulnerable as well, isn't it? And about being honest with ourselves. Not presuming as we start this week with its busyness.

First thing on Monday morning you've got so much to do, meetings to go to, classes, seminars, whatever. Well, I'll be fine. It's difficult to get time.

But will we be fine? Will it be easy for us to go through this week without coming before the Lord and saying, Lord, you've saved me and you've called me into this great service. But you need to help me.

[17:12] You need to help me be protected. In case we are carefree or blasé or careless about our spiritual lives, let me just read this one quote that I came across.

It's possible to say that not only this or that particular battle, the spiritual battle, the writer has been writing about the various spiritual battles that we face in daily life. It's possible to say not only this or that particular battle, but the entire war will be lost unless we exert ourselves.

In other words, unless we act, unless we take this seriously. It's true that the entire Council of God from eternity will never fail, but it is just as true that in the plan of God from eternity, it was decided that victory will be given to those who overcome.

And he quotes from Revelation 2 and 11 and 17. Overcomers are conquerors, and in order to conquer, one must fight.

He's not saying that our fight, that our works, our actions were saved, but he's saying that having been saved, what happens then? We just sit back?

[18:22] No. We take up the reality of the fact that we'll be attacked, and because our desire is to live for the Lord, because our desire is to support each other as we go through our weeks and our months and our years and our various occupations, supporting each other, building each other up as God's people.

Then we act, and as he says, that we are able to exert ourselves. So we've seen that there's a reality here of spiritual attack, and we've seen very briefly what we're to do, what we're to do about it, how we're to respond to this.

But can I just finish with a couple of things, a couple of concluding thoughts from this passage and elsewhere. And the first is this, that it's not just about us, is it?

This isn't just talking about you as an isolated individual. So here in St. Columbus tonight, there are, I don't know, however many people, 40 people, but this isn't just about us in our individual, separate daily lives, because throughout the Book of Ephesians, Paul makes loads of references to the body.

And that's important for us to remember, because this fight against sin, this fight against the spiritual forces that would want to see you individually fall, is also fighting against us collectively, because what the spiritual forces, the devil forces want to see is this church completely empty.

[19 : 58] He just wants us to fall. So, some evidence for this. Well, let me just read out a few verses about the body from this book.

Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4, where he chose us in him before the creation of the world. He chose us, plural. This is for us as the family.

Chapter 1 verse 7, in him we have redemption through his blood. This is what we share, isn't it? You know, we often hear it said of groups of Christians, when we come together, what is it that brings us together?

Is it that we all like the same football team? Is it that we all have the same taste of food? Is it that we all work in the same office? No, none of those things, we're Christ's followers.

We're saved by the gospel. And so, that's what it tells us in this chapter, isn't it? In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins in accordance with the riches of God's grace. That's what we come together to celebrate.

[21 : 02] That's why we come together to praise God. And that's what we have in common. Chapter 2 verse 21, in him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit. So, as we grow individually, as Christians in our faith, we work together so that we support each other and so that we're built up.

And as it says here, so that we become a dwelling in which God lives by his spirit, by his spirit, God dwells amongst us. And in chapter 3 verse 10, as we looked at this morning, his intent, God's purposes, in calling people from all people groups to himself, his purpose was that now through the church, the manifold, or many faceted, many splendid wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms.

We looked at this this morning. So that as we are built up together as God's people, and as we overcome, and as we pray for each other to overcome against the struggles in the world and against the temptations that we face, then the angels in heaven rejoice.

We saw that this morning. And that's something that we do together as the body of God's people. And so we come to the last chapter and we find the same principle at work here. This isn't just about ourselves individually.

[22 : 36] This is about us as God's people collectively. Look at verse 6 and verse 18. Having gone through the armor of God, we see the last example there in verse 17, take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

What does he then say? And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Would this in mind be alert? And always keep on praying for all the saints.

Always pray for all the saints. Always pray for each other. It's a full-time job when you look at the verses, isn't it? Look at the amount of times it says all.

Praying the Spirit on all occasions. So in other words, have a spirit of prayer within you so that even if you're busy or even if you have a couple of seconds, you have an attitude of prayer.

So where do you go when you face trouble? You don't immediately internalize it. You think, man, how am I going to deal with this? You go to the Lord. We can go to each other for support as well.

[23 : 43] Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. Would this in mind be alert? And always keep on praying for all the saints. You pray through the directory?

It's a good practice, maybe. Maybe it's a good practice for all of us. Praying through the directory. So first thought, just to finish off, that this battle against the forces of evil that would seek to destroy us is that it's for all of us to take note of.

And it's for all of us to support us in as well. But finally, the final why and what for really has to be, doesn't it? Why would we protect ourselves?

Why would we fight against becoming so used to sin that we just live with it in our lives? Well, so that we can have a clear view of Jesus.

The closer we get to sin, the harder we'll find to become closer to Jesus. Isn't that right? The more we embrace sin in our lives, the more we treat it like, well, it's not that bad.

[24 : 48] It's not really that harmful. The more it will separate us from our Saviour Jesus. And the more it will very probably separate us from our family, from our Christian family, from those around us.

And we can become more blasé, more hardened and more cut off. But remember the example of the rich young ruler. Remember that he came to Jesus.

But he went away sad, didn't he? Why did he go away sad? Well, because the thing that was blocking his vision, the thing that he couldn't really see past, was his wealth.

That was the thing for him. He was looking at all the things he had, and he couldn't get rid of them all. So what is, you know, we have to be honest with ourselves and say, is there something that gets in the way?

What is it that blocks my vision? What is it that I am tempted to rely on? I'm tempted to become an idolater of? And is that the thing that would keep me? You know, we have such a visual culture, there are so many things to distract us.

[25 : 53] There are so many things, not necessarily wrong in and of themselves, but we can fix it on them, can't we? But what our prayer needs to be, is Lord, help me to see the reality of the spiritual warfare that I'm engaged in.

Because you've saved me and called me into this life to find out what pleases the Lord, help me to be somebody who's aware of the battles that will come against me.

Help me to be aware of myself, and help me to be somebody who wants to support and to pray for others. So, I'm going to read one final verse in closing. Hebrews chapter 12, sorry.

Let me just read this. Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 and 2. Now, this is our example, just in closing. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

Let's just get rid of it. Let's fight against it. I remember one of my classes in the college, Professor Donald MacLeod, used to talk about the way that the Bible spoke about killing off sin in our lives, and he would say, murder it!

[27 : 00] Bludgeon it to death! That's how strongly we need to take the reality of sin in our lives. So, let's throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us in Christ Jesus. Let's fix our eyes on Jesus. The author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorned its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let's fix our eyes on Jesus. Let's pray. Lord, we pray that you would help us to be alive to the threat against ourselves.

Forgive us when we hold on to sin, forgive us when we get too familiar with it. Thank you so much for the example of Jesus. Thank you for all the temptation and the strife and the trouble that he endured because he was so firmly set on the cross because of his love for us.

He was determined to go through with the plan that you had for him. Remind us of that, Lord, tonight. Help us to remember the sacrifice of Jesus.

[28 : 15] Help us to be motivated by the love that he had for us and that he showed towards us in all that he did for us. And help us then to be determined to take our stand and to support each other in taking our stand against the devil's schemes, against the one who would seek to kill off our relationship with you.

Lord, instead we call out to you tonight and pray that you would make us alive in Christ. Fill our vision with him. Help us because we know so often that we can become cold and our hearts can grow dim.

We pray this in his name, our Saviour's name, Jesus. Amen.