

“WHEN IT’S ALL OVER BUT THE SHOUTING”

Studies in Ephesians – Living Worthy of Who We Are – 11

Ephesians 6:10-20 (p. 1137)

Eugene Peterson has a captivating way of paraphrasing scripture. Listen to how he begins this final section of Ephesians, beginning at chapter 6, verse 10: *And that about wraps it up. God is strong, and he wants you strong. So take everything the Master has set out for you, well-made weapons of the best materials. And put them to use so you will be able to stand up to everything the Devil throws your way. This is no afternoon athletic contest that we’ll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels. Be prepared. You’re up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it’s all over but the shouting you’ll still be on your feet.*

Let me ask you one question. When it’s all over but the shouting, what will it take for you to still be on your feet? 490 years ago a theology professor named Martin Luther marched up to the doors of the great cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany and posted there 95 arguments he had with the Church for straying from scriptural truth. Summoned to the council at the Diet of Worms, Luther was told to recant his actions and to apologize for his writings against the policies of the Church. Luther replied, *“Since your majesty and your lordships ask for a plain answer, I will give you one without horns or teeth. Unless I am convinced by Scripture or by right reason, for I trust neither in popes or councils, I am bound by the texts of the Bible; my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I neither can nor will recant anything, since it is neither right nor safe to act against conscience. God help me. Amen.”*

Almost 2000 years ago, two fishermen, uneducated in the schools of public speaking and theology, stood before a council of highly trained religious leaders and teachers who demanded that they stop speaking of the claims of Jesus of Nazareth and preaching faith in his name. Peter and John replied, *“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God; for we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”*

About 3200 years ago, an elderly warrior stood before a newly formed nation that was about to occupy land promised to their ancestors by God hundreds of years before. It was a day for which they had dreamed, fought, prayed, and waited. That moment finally had come. Before they were dismissed to enter that new world, Joshua challenged the people: *“If serving the Lord seems undesirable*

to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

These are all people who stood firm in their faith against the odds. We honor them and others of the faith because they were unashamed to take a stand without a guarantee that any others would stand with them. They were men and women of conviction who were committed to eternal principles that have withstood the test of time and cultural differences. These and countless others make up that "great cloud of witnesses" who have gone before us, who are even now cheering us on, as Paul wrote in Ephesians 6, to take the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

As we honor and remember those who have lived lives of faith and conviction, honor and duty, we bless their memory and thank God for their witness. But we must do more than that. We want to hear and respond to the words of encouragement they have been whispering down through the ages. What are they saying to us in this hour?

First, "***stand firm against the evils of the day.***" Edmund Burke once said, "*The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.*" The greatest danger to our country, to our families, to our faith and the freedoms we enjoy is not terrorism; it is apathy. The greatest threat to the well-being of everything we love is not external; it is internal.

Paul clearly pointed out in our lesson this morning that we are confronted by something vastly more powerful than physical armies and weaponry. We are engaged in spiritual warfare that would undermine everything we hold dear. Listen again to Eugene Peterson's paraphrases in *The Message*: "*This is no afternoon athletic contest that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels.*"

The story is told of a fourth century monk who spent his life in prayer, fasting, and raising vegetables for the community kitchen. One day, this monk named Telemachus sensed the Lord calling him to go to Rome. He had no idea why, but obediently, he responded and made his journey to the capital of the Empire. Arriving during the holiday season, the city was bustling with excitement. The crowds soon made their way to the Coliseum where the gladiator fights were being held. Telemachus followed along, still unaware of his mission.

As he watched the crowd cheering as men murdered each other for their amusement, the little monk was troubled deeply. Unable to sit and watch anymore, Telemachus leapt the wall and started shouting, "*In the name of Christ forbear!*" No one paid any attention to this puny little man running around these muscular

gladiators except to laugh at him. One gladiator sent him sprawling with a blow from his shield. Still, Telemachus refused to stop, rushing in the way of those trying to fight. *“In the name of Christ, forbear!”* he continued to shout. One gladiator, almost struck by another because of the monk’s interference, furiously took his sword and drove it down into the body of the monk.

Suddenly the fighting stopped. The crowd became silent. Then, one by one, the spectators began to leave the Coliseum. The gladiators quietly made their way out the gates. The murderous games were over. There were other forces at work, of course; but that innocent figure lying in the sand, that little monk who boldly stood against the inhumane spectacle of murder as entertainment, became the force that put a stop to the gladiator games in Rome.

Dante wrote, *“The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who in a period of moral crisis maintain their neutrality.”* I am quite sure that Telemachus is among that great cloud of witnesses that is speaking to us today, *“Stand firm against the evils of your day. God is counting on you just as God was counting on us!”*

Second, *“stand firm for what is good.”* It takes a lot of courage to stand up against the evils of the day. It takes every bit as much conviction to stand up for what is right and good and true. Again, I like the way Peterson expressed Paul’s words: *“Be prepared. You’re up against far more than you can handle on your own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it’s all over but the shouting you’ll still be on your feet.”* Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation – those aren’t just words. Learn how to apply them. You’ll need them throughout your life. Make a stand for what is good.

Many years ago Anthony Bloom wrote these words: *“In a world of competition, in a world of predatory animals, in a world of cruelty and heartlessness, the only hope one can have is an act of mercy, an act of compassion, a completely unexpected act which is rooted neither in duty nor in natural relationships, which will suspend the action of the cruel, violent, heartless world in which we live.”*

At Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial outside Jerusalem, there is a tree planted in honor of Chiune Sugihara. In 1939 the Japanese government appointed him ambassador to Lithuania. Sugihara defied protocol and wrote countless unauthorized visas for thousands of Jewish refugees who were desperately trying to flee the Nazis who were closing in. A book entitled *Conspiracy of Kindness*, a tribute to Sugihara, suggests that our proactive acts of goodness, love, mercy, compassion and kindness will be the witness that convinces an unbelieving, skeptical world of the reality of God’s grace. They’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.

During the great revival of 1858, a young Episcopalian pastor named Dudley Tyng preached some courageous messages against the slave trade that was frankly tolerated by many churches. Tyng was very outspoken, and his sermons offended some people in his congregation who were slave owners. They forced him to resign. Tyng's friends wanted him to continue his preaching, so they rented a hall in which he preached regularly to large crowds. One evening he was preaching to a group of men at the YMCA on Exodus 10:11, "*Go now, ye that are men, and serve the Lord.*" It was to be his last sermon.

That week Tyng got his sleeve caught in a corn shelling machine on his family's farm. His arm was mangled and, due to the severe loss of blood and shock, Tyng died shortly thereafter. On his death bed, he asked his good friend, a Presbyterian pastor named George Duffield, to preach to the men at the YMCA the next Sunday. Duffield asked Tyng, "*What message shall I send for you?*" Tyng replied, "*Tell them to stand up for Jesus.*"

Duffield preached that Sunday night on Ephesians 6:14 – "*Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist.*" At the end of the message, Duffield read some verses he had written in response to his friend's last exhortation:

Stand up; stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross.

Lift high his royal banner, it must not suffer loss.

From victory unto victory, his army shall he lead

'Til every foe is vanquished, and Christ is Lord indeed.

Lift high his royal banner of love, righteousness, truth, goodness, mercy, compassion. Paul put the matter this way in his letter to the Romans: "*Don't allow yourself to be overpowered with evil; Take the offensive – overpower evil by good.*" Can you hear Dudley Tyng's words to us this morning? "*Tell them to stand up for Jesus, for what is right and good and true. He is counting on you.*"

There is one final word we can hear from this cloud of witnesses today: What you stand against and what you stand for depends on what you stand upon. In other words, "***stand firm on the Word of God.***" This is the testimony of Luther, Peter and John, Joshua, and countless others who stood firm on the Rock of Ages. We stand firm on the word of God by committing ourselves to the purposes of God as revealed in the Bible, believing the promises of God as revealed to the people of God throughout the ages, and following Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. Jesus said, "*Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.*"

That great cloud of witnesses is telling us today to live our lives, to build godly marriages and homes, to take our stand against evil, to stand strong for all

that is good and right and true, and to stand firm on the eternal word of God. Listen to the words of David in Psalm 27. He had his share of troubles, but he kept his sure footing on the rock-solid faithfulness of God's word. Take his words to heart. David wrote:

The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident. One thing I asked of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock. Amen to that.

There's a scene from an old TV show in which a Catholic priest offers a prayer among a group of people, many of whom were not very religious and so were unaccustomed to prayer. But the priest offered a good prayer and he concluded with an "Amen." There was a moment of awkward silence, which was finally broken when someone asked, "Is that it?" To which another person replied, "Of course! Nothing comes after 'Amen!'"

Oh, really? I beg to differ. In a very real sense the "Amen" is just the beginning. There comes a point in even the most prayerful life when, for the moment at least, you're finished praying. There comes a point when you say, "Amen," open your eyes, unclasp your hands, get up off your knees, and go back to work – you go back to tending the kids. What comes after "Amen" is a life of service, but also a life of spiritual warfare. What comes after "Amen" is becoming well-equipped people who can stand tall for God in a world that would put you down. And not until it's all over but the shouting and we're still on our feet will we be able to stand among that great cloud of witnesses and offer that final "Amen." And all God's people said, "Amen."

αμεν