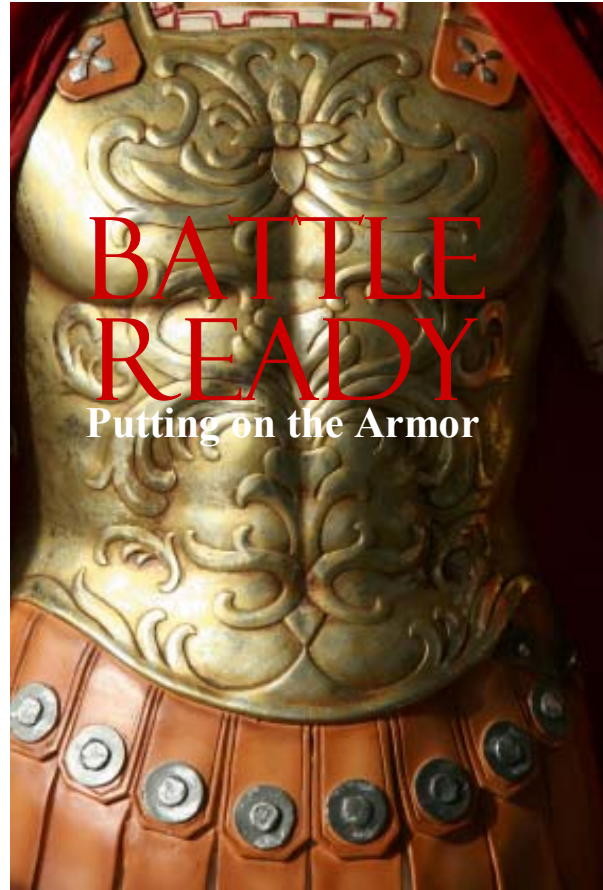


The Covenant Pulpit



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When I was the East Coast President of *Mastermedia International* I met a lot of media executives, but never one as angry as my friend from a major Hollywood film studio. He was in New York City to oversee the filming of a blockbuster movie. As we huddled over lunch in a Manhattan restaurant, he complained that his movie was way over budget, the A-list director was adding soft porn scenes that would spike it from a PG film to a hard-core R rating, and the star actress was missing in action.

He shared with me the comedy of errors that had doomed their last movie, causing it to lose a \$100 million. He lamented that too many Hollywood films are hemorrhaging red ink because the media elite are out of touch with mainstream America. He said that the average movie studio lost money on eight out of ten films. He showed me a *Wall Street Journal* study documenting that PG movies were 16 times more likely to make a profit than R rated films. Yet 67 percent of all Hollywood movies are R rated.

I responded in disbelief, "But isn't Hollywood all about making money?" He laughed, "You've got to be kidding!" Then he confided, "Hollywood is all about ego and status. Directors want to be seen as relevant and edgy by their own peers. Most of the media elite are committed to advancing a radical social and political agenda." Then he leaned forward, and whispered, "The real issue is spiritual warfare." This media mogul from one of the biggest film studios in the world continued in a hushed voice,

"I believe that invisible, dark forces pull the strings behind the scenes in Hollywood. My associates would say I'm crazy. They don't even believe that Satan exists, but he controls their very lives, and almost everything they produce. And he is dragging our culture into the abyss of darkness."

As I left the restaurant, his words echoed in my mind: "The real issue is spiritual warfare." As a missionary to media leaders in Hollywood and New York City, I had a fresh understanding of Ephesians 6:12:

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places."

A few weeks later I experienced this battle first hand. I had just led a Bible study on Wall Street and was headed to a luncheon meeting with a group of media leaders. As I entered the old subway station under the World Trade Center, an unshaven man in ragged clothes followed me in the shadows, spewing out the vilest language imaginable. Between curses, he shouted, "Get out of New York before it's too late! We don't want you here."

I kept moving, trying to ignore him. But he dogged my every step, continuing to curse me. Finally, I turned and yelled back, "Why are you

doing this?" He hissed, "You know why." At that moment I thought I saw a demon's face. I felt a cold chill of dread, but somehow managed to shout back, "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus!" With a look of bewilderment, he faded back into the shadows.

I quickly went through the gate, boarded the subway train and sat down. I closed my eyes, thankful to be alone in the car. When I opened them, a woman was sitting across from me. She had materialized out of nowhere, grotesquely obese and clothed in a long black dress. Her purple spiked hair, black lipstick, and heavy combat boots were gothic to the extreme. Smoldering eyes were focused on me with intense hatred. I shuddered and looked away. Then she hissed at me across the aisle, "We don't want you here! Leave us alone!" I felt as if some force had sucked the life out of me.

The subway train came to a grinding halt, and I managed to stumble out of the car. I almost crawled up the stairs to the street, and called Joyce on my cell phone. She will tell you that she has never heard me so frightened. I stammered out, "Honey, pray for me. I've just come face-to-face with Satan, and he is trying to drive us away from this place."

The truth is: we are always battling the forces of Satan. Most of the time, we don't even know it. But for a brief moment I saw the invisible made visible. I had always known *intellectually* and *theologically* that there was a spirit world, but had never encountered it so viscerally. That day I saw *real* reality, and it changed my life forever. I believe that the most important principle we need to learn, if we are going to be battle ready Christians, is the one that St. Paul teaches us in Ephesians 6:12:

**Our real enemies are *unseen*
and battles are won in *spiritual* realms.**

St. Paul was writing to Christians in the city of Ephesus. In many ways, the ancient Ephesus was much like modern day Naples, Florida. It was a gorgeous seaside city full of gated communities and pleasure palaces. Every winter, the wealthy flocked to Ephesus to luxuriate in its ornate public baths and buy luxury goods in its shopping malls. Its massive and magnificent Temple of Artemis was one of the "seven wonders" of the ancient world. Ephesus was the "Broadway" of St. Paul's day, filled with theaters where the world's greatest entertainment was staged. Its main amphitheater seated 44,000 people, making it the largest outdoor theater in antiquity. In the ruins of ancient Ephesus, archeologists have uncovered a huge graveyard of slain gladiators. The Ephesians were literally entertaining themselves to death. Ephesus grew fabulously rich catering to the pleasures of its seasonal visitors. No wonder, it was second only to Rome in size and wealth.

Believers in Ephesus were among the richest in the fledgling Christian movement. For the most part the pagan authorities left them alone to

practice their religion in peace. Their church was among the most blessed in history. St. Paul planted it. His favorite disciple, Timothy, became its first pastor. John the Apostle spent the last years of his life in this church. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also part of the congregation. Three books of the New Testament were addressed to the Ephesian church and her pastor. Life was good for Christians in ancient Ephesus by the sea. And life is good for Christians in modern Naples by the sea.

But the good times never last. St. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:13, "Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you will be able to stand your ground..." Notice, Paul doesn't say, "...if the day of evil comes..." but "...when the day of evil comes..." A "day of evil" will come for all of us. Thirty years after St. Paul wrote this letter a mad emperor by the name of Diocletian unleashed a persecution against the Church. It was especially horrific in Ephesus. Christians lost almost everything. Hundreds were thrown to the lions in the arena. The "day of evil" came with frightening suddenness, catching many believers by surprise.

Look again at Ephesians 6:13. Paul says, "Therefore, put on the full armor of God *so that when* the day of evil comes..." You have to put on the *full* armor *beforehand*. If you wait until "the day of evil" to put it on, you will be too late. We have to be battle ready *now*. I believe that a "day of evil" is on the near horizon for Christians in our age. Like the Ephesians, we need to be battle ready for "days of evil" yet to come.

But it is critical that we understand the nature of our battle. Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but...against *the spiritual forces of evil in heavenly realms*." We are watching our economy unravel, the moral fabric of our culture being ripped apart, an increasingly anti-Christian militancy rising, and geo-political conflicts pushing us closer to Armageddon. Only the most naïve would dispute that tough times have arrived, and tougher ones are ahead.

But tough times require battle ready warriors. They also require warriors that understand the true nature of the war. The brilliant Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu wrote in his classic work, *The Art of War*, "The first rule of war is to know your enemy." We think that certain political leaders are our enemies. We identify other nations, religions, or social views as our enemies. Some think that Hollywood is the enemy of morality. Or that Gay Unions are Public Enemy # 1 when it comes to the institution of marriage. Or that Islam or climate change or the collapse of financial markets poses the greatest threat to our future. Or that our spouse, or our children, or our parents, or the place where we work, or our church, or our circumstances, or whatever else causes us misery, is our enemy.

We get jazzed up, and go off to war against those people. We think we will change Hollywood if we boycott their product. We will get rid of abortion if

we march in front of clinics. We will transform America if we get the right political party in power. We argue, yell, make threats, and forward all kinds of inflammatory emails to each other. Wives nag husbands, men beat up on their wives, parents harass their kids, and children manipulate their folks. Churches organize committees, create trendy programs using Madison Avenue techniques, and do all kinds of cutting edge media stuff, and think we will change culture by copying culture. Nations war against nations, using the latest weapons of mass destruction. We try to outsmart, outthink, and outspend each other. It's flesh against flesh. In the end, we only manage to wear ourselves out changing nothing.

Again, read how St. Paul begins verse 13, "For our struggle is not against *flesh and blood...*" Sun Tzu says, "Wars are lost because we have not identified the right enemy. And when we do, we often misjudge his power." These two truths are immutable: 1) "Flesh and blood" is not our ultimate enemy. 2) Our ultimate enemy cannot be defeated by "flesh and blood." Over the next weeks Rob Hamilton and I are going to teach you how to wage spiritual warfare. To be battle ready you need to know these three facts:

1. There is an *invisible* world more real than that which is *visible*.

Read again Ephesians 6:12: "For our struggle is...against the *spiritual* forces in *heavenly* realms. Spiritual forces don't have physical bodies. These are the unseen armies of angels and demons who move on swift and silent wings between heaven and hell. The phrase "heavenly realms" was used in ancient times to describe an invisible world that is closer to us than our own breath. In modern times it has been called the *Fifth Dimension* or *One Step Beyond* or the *Twilight Zone*. The ancient Greek philosopher, Plato said, "It is the unseen world that controls the world we see." In his book, *The Screwtape Letters* C.S. Lewis wrote, "This invisible world is more real than our own...Yet Satan deceives us into thinking that it does not exist." But the Bible is clear that angels do exist, and are everywhere in heavenly realms.

Angels surround us with protection. King David wrote in Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them." Psalm 99:11 repeats that fact: "For (God) will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your steps." In 2 Kings 6 the king of Syria sent an army of soldiers to kidnap the prophet Elisha. The prophet's servant saw them and began to scream in terror. But the Lord opened the eyes of the servant and he saw the hills filled with fire and angels surrounding the Syrians. If the veil that separates the visible from the invisible could be ripped away, you would see this whole room filled with angels right now.

When I was in China a man told me about a time the Communist police came to their house church to arrest the congregation. Inside, the believers were crying out to God to save them. Suddenly, the police began to scream

and run away. Later, one of the policemen told a relative in the village, "When we got to the house, we saw giant men with faces of fire surrounding it." In Uganda we heard about armed rebels who herded a congregation into a clearing to execute them. As they knelt down to be shot, they cried out to God to spare their lives. Out of the jungle came a swarm of killer bees that sent the executioners to flight. The Christians walked away untouched by bees or bullets. They were positive that angels had stirred up those bees.

Children have guardian angels. In Matthew 18:10 Jesus says that "the little ones" have angels in heaven who wait before the face of our Father, ready to run to their protection. Do you worry about your kids? Satan and his demons are out to destroy them. In their arsenal are temptations baited on a thousand hooks, from Hollywood to atheist professors in the classroom. The battle for your children must first of all be waged on your knees, praying to your Father in heaven to send his angels to protect them. Over the next several weeks we are going to show you how to make your kids battle ready, teaching you how to put the whole armor on them.

Angels come to minister in times of stress. In Hebrews 1:14 we read that angels are "...ministering spirits sent to serve those who inherit salvation." Twice angels came to minister to Jesus. After his wilderness temptation, God sent angels to feed and care for him. After his soul-wrenching agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, God again sent angels to minister to him.

He sends them to us too. Hebrews 13:2 says, "...some people have entertained angels without knowing it." Maybe it's the person who pulled over to help you when your car broke down on a rainy night; or that stranger who put out a hand to stop you when you were about to step off a sidewalk into oncoming traffic; or the gal in the crowd who smiled at you when your heart was breaking inside. Could it be that angels have stepped out of the invisible realm, taken on human form, and stepped into your life on numerous occasions, but you just didn't recognize them?

Angels guard our churches. When St. John writes about the Seven Churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2&3, he says that each one has a star. This word *star* is used throughout the book of Revelation to describe angels. I believe that every church has an angel assigned to it. Conversely, I believe that Satan assigns demons to destroy churches. Some churches are left alone. They are so dead and cold that they pose no danger to the kingdom of darkness. But when a church catches on fire, and its Holy Spirit power begins to pose a threat to Satan's kingdom, the Enemy of our Soul will pull out all the stops to destroy that congregation. Pastors will be tormented, parishioners will become disgruntled, key people will get sick or be snared by sin. It's a dangerous thing for Christians to get serious about their faith. But God also assigns his angels to come to the aid of battle ready warriors who will fight their battle in spiritual realms, knowing that they can only be

won in the arena of righteousness, fueled by passionate worship and propelled by prayer.

Angels and demons are assigned to nations. Daniel 10:7-21 is one of the most mysterious and intriguing passages in the Bible. The prophet Daniel tells us of a great time of distress in ancient Babylon. He desperately prayed for God's intervention, and then waited for more than three weeks. Finally, the archangel Michael arrived on the scene. He told Daniel that he had been delayed because he had wrestled for 21 days with a great demon who was over the kingdom of Babylon. Angels and demons are right now warring in heavenly places over Washington DC, Islamabad, Pakistan, and a thousand other places where the future of the world hangs in the balance. It may seem forever after our prayers that the angels may come to our rescue, but they will overcome the demons in heavenly places. Ultimately the great geopolitical issues of our time will not be decided by bullets or ballots, but by God's people who are willing to battle in spiritual realms. It was only after Daniel mourned, fasted, and prayed that the archangel Michael came to defeat the great demon who was terrorizing ancient Iraq.

2. There is an eternal and violent war being waged in the invisible world for the control of all things visible.

Ephesians 6:12 begins with the words, "Our struggle..." All of us desperately crave peace and comfort, but the Bible tells us that war is an inevitable fact of life. You can read about the great war of the ages in Revelation 12. It begins in verse 7 with the words, "And there was war in heaven..." It goes on to describe how the mightiest of all God's archangels, Lucifer, tried to take over heaven. A third of the angels in heaven joined him in his palace coup. But the archangel Michael and his angelic armies won the day, and Lucifer and his fallen angels were hurled down to earth. But they haven't given up. The battle still rages.

Revelation 12:13 goes on to describe how Satan (pictured as a great dragon) has pursued God's chosen people. He has been the puppet master who has pulled the strings of one empire after another to attack and destroy Israel. Then he tried to kill the child of Israel, Jesus Christ. And now, according to Revelation 12:17, he wages war against all of us who belong to Jesus. When tyrants and governments persecute Christians, it is really Satan waging war against us. Everything that comes against the believer is hatched in hell. The people who try to hurt us aren't the enemy. The invisible ones who manipulate them are our enemies. We aren't called to resist people; we are called to resist Satan. He is the only one who truly hates us, because he hates the God who loves us so passionately that he sent His Son to die for our redemption.

Revelation 9:11 speaks of the awful days at the end of time when armies of demons will come out of the abyss to torment the world, and fight their final death struggle with Christ and his armies. Revelation 20: 7ff also describes,

in vivid and terrifying detail, the great battle at the end of time when Satan will gather the armies of the earth at a place called Armageddon in Israel. The nations will rise against God's people. But fire will come out of heaven to destroy them. Then Satan and his demons will be cast into the Lake of Fire to be tormented forever and ever. But, before that final battle, there are more to be waged. Satan is prowling about to devour those who are unarmed and unprepared. He is the invisible Spirit behind our jealousy and selfishness; the dark force behind our arguments and fights. When we people shoot at each other, we are firing at the wrong targets. Instead husbands and wives, parents and children, divided churches, and disputing parties should get down on their knees together and fight the battle in "heavenly realms" to defeat "spiritual rulers and authorities."

3. Fight against the real enemies

In Ephesians 6:12 he calls them "rulers and authorities." These are celestial hierarchies. These are archangels in heaven like Michael and demonic archangels cast down to earth. They are the great angels and demons assigned to nations and churches. Michael and the strong demon over Babylon wrestled for 21 days straight. In the wilderness of the Jordan River, Michael and Lucifer wrestled for the body of Moses. Jude 9 says that Satan had been given such high authority by God that Michael didn't even dare speak against him. If even the highest archangel in heaven, Michael, can be wrestled to a draw for 21 days, how will we manage to defeat such demonic powers? When Jacob wrestled all night with the Angel of the Lord, his hip socket was torn out of place and he limped for the rest of his life. How do we outwit the "Father of Lies" or recognize the Evil One when he masquerades as the "Angel of Light"? It requires a powerful armor, and effective prayer life, that calls us to take battle readiness seriously.

Verse 12 also describes our enemies as "powers of this dark world." By this St. Paul means physical manifestations of the invisible. These are the powers we see in our world. Nazism and the horrors it produced was Satanic in every way. It is seen in the fantasy images being churned out by Hollywood. It wears the surgeon's mask in abortion centers. But we will never defeat these "flesh-and-blood" manifestations of invisible darkness by attacking it with flesh-and-blood warfare. Flesh cannot defeat the spirit world. Only the Holy Spirit can overcome the evil spirit. Ultimately Michael will defeat the power demon who rules over Persia.

The enemy is not who or what we see, but the ones who are behind the scenes in "heavenly realms." The enemy is not other people, but the invisible forces of evil that move people to do evil. It's those unseen spiritual forces that we must pray against, teach against, and stand against. God does not ask us to be nice, gentle Christians. He is looking for holy warriors who will forsake the weapons of the flesh and strap on holy armor for spiritual warfare. To that end, we will become battle ready. Will you sign on?