

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Ephesians 6:10–20**

**Sermon: “The Battle is Real”**

Most people today probably don't realize this war ever happened: the Spanish-American War. It was a brief war, from April to August 1898.

This is the war that began with Americans shouting, “Remember the Maine!” Again, most don't remember the Maine. This was the war with Admiral Dewey at the battle of Manila Bay. This was the war with Teddy Roosevelt and the Rough Riders and their charge up San Juan Hill.

Almost as if it had never happened, in four months, Spain had surrendered. Fact is, they weren't much of an opponent.

There's another war not many people realize is going on, because the enemy is largely unseen. This war is more critical than any our nation has ever fought, and the casualties are much heavier. This time the enemy is no pushover. Every ounce of our energy, every weapon we can bring to bear, every defense we can raise will not be enough. In this war, we need the Full Armor of God.

Do you know which war I'm talking about? I'm not talking about the war against terrorism that began 20 years ago on September 11, 2001. No. We're at war against a different unseen enemy, far more dangerous. We are at war with Satan. In our text, Paul writes to the Ephesians: ***"<sup>10</sup>Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup>Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."***

It's no collapsing Spanish empire we're fighting. We're at war with none other than the great evil empire and ruler of darkness himself, Satan. And you know what? Satan likes the way a lot of this war is going. Because his wiles are working. He's got enemies, he's got allies, and there are plenty of neutrals. But he's tricked nearly all of them into forgetting what this war is about. Think about Satan's enemies. I'm talking about his human enemies, Christians.

Many Christians are confused about the war to be fought with Satan. We hear television evangelists and fundamentalist preachers talk about the great war to be fought between God's forces and the forces of Satan. They call it Armageddon the great war at the end of world.

Many fundamentalist Christians believe the wars we have been fighting in the Middle East will be the final war to end all wars, physically fought on earth, in the Middle East. For some Christians, this prospect of a final all-out earthly war against Satan's henchmen is a terrifying thought.

When people make some end-of-the-world battle that important to their theology, or when Christians become frightened about it, Satan is winning the skirmish. He is diverting attention from the fact that the Great War is being fought right now and we are winning!

Satan's got other poor souls even more confused. As hard as it is to imagine, the devil has human allies. Satan worship is a real religion in America. One satanic priest claims that as many as fifty thousand human sacrifices are performed every year in the United States.

Don't hear about that on the evening news. That number may be hugely inflated, but time and again police do attribute violent crimes to satanic cults. We might be naïve to this as well, but just turn on your television, what some of the movies and new shows that we are bombarded with. The entertainment world employs a satanic influence. Often the satanic influence begins with things that seem like fun: drawing pentagrams, playing with Ouija boards, conducting séances just as a gag. But thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands, do consciously sell their souls to the devil.

Do people who are into devil worship know what they're doing? The answer is probably yes and no. They believe the devil is real and can really give them what they want. But surely, they cannot know what's finally in store for them. They can't possibly grasp how terrible hell will be. Surely even those who have consciously allied themselves with Satan have forgotten that he is fighting a very deadly war against their souls. You know what's even more tragic? Satan hopes to inflict the same fate on those who try to remain neutral in this war.

This is a huge number of people. Remember, there is no fence sitting when it comes to faith and believing in Christ as Savior. So many people, even so many professing Christians, don't really believe we are at war at all. They don't really believe there is a devil. This may be the devil's wiliest scheme. When someone doesn't believe in Satan, or when we forget, we forget we are at war.

When we do that, we get soft, flabby. We become even more vulnerable to sin than we were already. We can begin to rationalize our favorite sins, whatever they may be loving our cars a little too much; showing love for our kids a little too little; failing to show love to God at all, except the occasional Sunday morning; maybe even pretending sex outside of marriage is love.

When we forget our war against Satan, we can rationalize almost anything, because we think we are hearing words of wisdom rather than whispers of the enemy.

Paul won't let us forget: ***"<sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*** Satan is real, he's at war with us right now, and he's powerful! Yet when the last drop of blood has been shed, we will be able to stand against him, because

God provides us with all the armor we need. ***"<sup>13</sup>Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."*** Believe it or not, the Spanish-American War was a war that America wanted. No less than Theodore Roosevelt, then serving as assistant secretary of the navy, wrote in 1897, "I should welcome any war. This country needs one." And the whole country got behind it. For that brief period, the energy of the whole nation was devoted to war. We need the whole armor of God for our war against Satan. To Paul's way of thinking, there's no such thing as putting on half the armor of God. We need all the protection God gives!

Picture the armor in your minds. A Roman soldier preparing for battle first puts the belt over his tunic. ***“<sup>14</sup>Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth,”*** Every soldier in every age and in every kind of war needs to feel convinced that the cause for which he’s fighting is true. Our cause is true. We stand against Satan and against the world because God has opened our eyes to see him as he truly is. Because Satan has blinded the world, it may ridicule us, abuse us, and call our cause foolish. But someday our cause will be vindicated.

***“Having put on the breastplate of righteousness,”***

We know our righteousness will never stand against Satan, because our righteousness, our works, the best we can do, is as filthy rags. But God has firmly fastened onto us the righteousness of Christ. Jesus did that on the cross, laying down his armor to die and rising from the grave to give us absolute protection against all Satan’s accusations the assurance that we are forgiven, that we wear Christ’s own holiness. As a result, we stand, ***“<sup>15</sup>and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.”***

In the midst of war comes that beautiful word, peace. Now that our sins are forgiven by Jesus' death, we are at peace with God. We are in holy alliance with God. That means we need never fear. ***"<sup>16</sup>In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; <sup>17</sup>and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."***

Satan will do everything he can to frighten us. He will tempt us, threaten us, and someday even bring physical death. At every turn, he will ask us, "Can God really get you out of this one?" In faith, we say, "Yes! He always has and always will." ***"If God is for us, who can be against us?"*** (Romans 8:31).

We have the helmet of salvation! Salvation has been won for us! In the ultimate battle of the cross and grave, Jesus defeated the devil and broke Satan's power. Satan fired all his arrows and spent all his weapons; he has nothing left. Christ has given us the victory by his death and resurrection. And that means someday he will certainly give us the crown to replace the helmet.

So, there we are, outfitted for war except that all our armor is worthless without a sword, “***the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.***” When fighting at close quarters, God’s holy Word is the best piece of all for warding off Satan’s thrusts. And it’s the only weapon we can use to attack, change things, even win for our Savior many of those neutrals and some of Satan’s own allies.

Magnificent armor! Every piece of it! But you know what makes it so powerful, truly invincible? All this is the very armor of Christ. Paul’s illustration of armor isn’t original to him. Way back in Isaiah 59, God looked down and saw that man didn’t have a chance. So, in Isaiah 59, God himself put on the same armor and entered the fray.

Paul is telling us that this armor of ours is battle-tested. It has been worn to victory. And the One who wore it before still fights for us. When we put on the armor of God, we are really wearing as our armor Christ himself. And if we are in Christ, we are invincible!

By 1898, Spain was a shell of its former self. Three hundred years earlier, it had been the most powerful nation on earth, but the defeat of its armada by the English in 1588 forever changed that. By the time we picked a fight with Spain, it was a pushover. Satan once ruled the world, and even today, working in the shadows, always lurking, he's no pushover. But he is pushed-over. Christ has knocked him flat. We are still at war; let us always remember that. But in Christ we are armed for victory!

Amen