

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Ephesians 6:10–20**

### **Sermon: Strength for the Ongoing Battle**

September 2<sup>nd</sup> is a special day in the world's history. Anyone remember why? August 14, 1945, marked the end of World War II with Japan's unconditional surrender to the United States. Then on September 2, the Japanese foreign minister signed a formal declaration of surrender aboard the battleship USS Missouri.

But there was one problem. No one told Hiroo Onoda, and when they did, he didn't believe them. Second Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda was an officer in the army of the Empire of Japan. He was part of a unit stationed in the Philippines and had been given an order to stay and fight to the end. His unit had been decimated, and there were only four survivors when Japan surrendered.

Onoda and the remaining Japanese soldiers waged guerilla warfare and refused to believe what they assumed was American propaganda that Japan had surrendered. One soldier eventually surrendered, the other two were killed, and finally only Onoda remained.

But he continued to wage his own war until his former commanding officer and his brother were brought to the Philippines to convince him that the war was over. That was 1974, twenty-nine years after the Japanese had lost the war! The battle continued for Onoda long after others had ceased to fight, and it continues for us still as Christians. Onoda died just 3 years ago this past January.

When Christ Jesus emerged from the tomb on that first Easter morn, he had triumphed over sin, death, and the devil. The Valiant One, our Lord Jesus Christ, has indeed won the war, but the evil one, Satan, will continue to fight against us until the bitter end.

But unlike Lieutenant Onoda, there will be no persuading him to stop his attacks. He will wage his war against the saints of God, knowing that he has been defeated but seeking to destroy as many of the saints of God as he can. That's why we'll always need the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:11).

One of America's great storytellers was radio broadcaster Paul Harvey. His daily broadcast, *The Rest of the Story*, surprised listeners with unknown tales about famous American figures. But Paul Harvey also offered critical commentary about the state of American culture. In one such commentary in 1964, he wrote an essay titled "If I Were the Devil," intended to be a warning to America against the moral decay and societal collapse so apparent to him. His approach in the essay was to describe how the devil would attack our nation.

One version of the essay states, "With flattery and promises of power I would get the courts to vote against God and in favor of pornography. Thus, I would evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, then from the Houses of Congress. Then in his own churches I'd substitute psychology for religion and deify science. If I were Satan I'd make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were Satan I'd just keep doing what I'm doing."

People are struggling all around us. Many aren't asking big questions about life. They just want to make their paychecks go a little further.

Just want health insurance so their children are covered. Want to get along with their families. They struggle against depression, cancer, addiction, or guilt over past sins. They just want a day when life isn't a constant struggle. But it's not just "those people." Life is a struggle for each and every one of us. Hardship and heartache are part of the daily struggle that we all face in this fallen world.

As great as those struggles are in our lives, we face an even greater struggle that isn't against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of evil at work. There really is a great cosmic struggle between good and evil, between God and Satan.

Paul describes the struggles Christians face with such evil as a wrestling match. This match is hardly the fictional drama of pro wrestling, but more the sly deceptions of a vicious but undetected enemy. This evil foe is behind the broken relationships and broken hearts that fall into his traps.

Satan attacks us so often without even being noticed as we are easily led astray. Though he may be shrewd, there's nothing weak about the one of whom Martin Luther said in his great hymn, "***On earth is not his equal.***" Peter pictures the old evil foe as a roaring lion, while our Lord describes him as the father of all lies. The warning from Paul is that our struggle is not just paying the bills or facing health issues, as intense as those are, but rather facing this fierce enemy who seeks only our destruction. How can we possibly stand against Satan and the dark forces of evil?

The only way we can stand against Satan is by knowing we don't have the strength within us. Left to our own devices, we cannot stand. We are easy prey for the devil's snares of lies and lust. In our weakness, we easily stumble into his traps of selfishness and greed. We are not equipped to battle against this fierce foe. But our strength comes from the Lord. While our text is often translated, "***Be strong in the Lord,***" it's perhaps better understood as "be strengthened in the Lord."

Our strength is not found in our knowledge, effort, or even our faith, but in Christ alone. It is in Christ and his cross that we are strengthened for the struggles against the devil's wiles that we face each day.

For though our Lord Jesus Christ came in humility and weakness, he alone is our refuge and strength. He is the one who conquered sin by keeping the Law perfectly in our place. He is the one who vanquished death by his triumphant death and resurrection from the grave. This Son of Man came to crush Satan's head and open for us the way of everlasting life. Your strength comes from the one who is mighty to save. It's as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, that they be "strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being" (3:16).

It is the strength that comes from God alone that enables you to stand. Even in a world of "COEXIST" bumper stickers and intolerant demands for tolerance, the people of God are able to stand for and by the truth of God's Word. We are able to stand against the devil and his schemes. For we have put on the new man, Christ Jesus, in the waters of Holy Baptism.

When Paul calls us to put on the full armor of God, the various pieces of armor that he proceeds to describe are all given in the one garment we put on in Holy Baptism. Clothed in Christ and his strength, we are able to stand against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, and against the spiritual forces of evil.

Strengthened by the Holy Spirit at work through the Word, we can stand firm in the Lord. Our spiritual knees may be wobbly and our resolve weak. We may be afraid as we gaze upon the enemies who attack us. We may be full of doubts and uncertainty standing against the devil and all the forces of evil. But the One who is in you, Christ Jesus the crucified and risen Lord, is greater than the one who is in the world, that old evil foe. So we can take heart and stand firm with the strength that the Lord gives.

Satan and the dark forces of evil will continue to wage war against the saints of God. Our life this side of eternity will still be marred by an ongoing wrestling with the enemies.

We will continue to see Satan at work even in the courthouses, schoolhouses, state houses, and our houses. But we are strengthened in the Lord as the Holy Spirit strengthens the baptized through his mighty Word. In the Lord's strength and the power of his might, we will not be misled by the devil's lies or fall into his traps. Instead, when the evil day comes, after we have done everything, we are strengthened to stand firm to the end.

Amen