Dead: Wage War Well Memory Verse: Romans 6:11

March 26th, 2023 Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:10-17

**SLIDE 1: Title**

 Welcome to our fifth week of Lent. During this season, we have been taking a good long, hard look at our sin. We have talked about how sin works, we have looked at the importance of being able to assess ourselves and not simply ignore the warning lights God might be flashing in our lives. We have admitted that we all struggle with “die-hard sins”, those pitfalls we seem to just keep falling into, those sins that we tolerate and justify…

 So now that we are more aware of the specifics of the sin we struggle with, today, we are going to gear up and take a look at the weapons we have available to us in this fight. We are born into a battlefield and as such, we need to fight! You might think all the warfare language I am using or have used is a bit overblown, but I think if you take a look at the apostle Paul’s writing, you find that he doesn’t shy away from speaking in these terms. So let’s talk about how we can wage war well. How can we move from Dead in sin, to Dead to sin?

 That really is the main question right? The bible is very clear, that sin is a problem, a problem that leads to death and we are all in big trouble. We are dead in sin, we are stuck and cannot get out. But then we have Romans 6:9-11, “We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has power over him. He died to sin once and for all with his death, but he lives for God with his life. In the same way, you should also consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.”

**SLIDE 2: Romans 6:9-11, “We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has power over him. He died to sin once and for all with his death, but he lives for God with his life. In the same way, you should also consider yourselves dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.”**

Through Christ we are made dead to sin. No longer are we dead in sin, but now, in Jesus we are dead to sin. And as such, we live for God! We put away wrongdoing and our old desires, because after all, we are now dead to sin. And as Paul asks earlier in that same chapter, “All of us died to sin. How can we still live in it?”

 And we answer… “I…I just…I mean, I…I don’t know. I believe in what Jesus did for me, I believe I am forgiven. I believe in transformation. But I also can’t deny that I am a sinner. How can those two things be true at the same time? How can I still live in sin? I don’t know.”

 This process is not cut and dried. It’s a struggle. It’s a fight and our call is to wage war well. It 100% requires the power and intervention of the Holy Spirit and it 100% requires my involvement and willingness to engage in the battle. We will not do well if we remain ill-trained and non-compliant. So today we are going to take a careful inventory of the weapons we have at our disposal. But before we can do that we need to recognize a rather important truth found in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, and this passage parallels today’s scripture reading from Ephesians in a lot of ways, when Paul talks about the armor of God. Here in 2 Corinthians he further describes our weapons.

**SLIDE 3: Corinthians 10:3-5 “Although we live in the world, we don’t fight our battles with human methods. Our weapons that we fight with are not human, but instead they are powered by God for the destruction of fortresses. They destroy arguments, and every defense that is raised up to oppose the knowledge of God. They capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”**

 “Although we live in the world, we don’t fight our battles with human methods.” So that is first and foremost. There is a reality that we cannot see or hear or touch. It’s supernatural, that is, beyond nature. It’s easy to forget about because it’s out of sight so it is out of mind. And that right there, our ability to dismiss the supernatural reality puts us at a disadvantage. We are good at focusing on what we can see right here, right now, but actually, we are being affected by and under attack from a supernatural reality that we largely ignore. So Paul continues, “Our weapons that we fight with are not human, but instead they are powered by God for the destruction of fortresses.” Talk about supernatural technology! Our weapons are powered by God for the destruction of fortresses. “They destroy arguments, and every defense that is raised up to oppose the knowledge of God. They capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” I want those weapons. I so often feel like I am out there swinging a stick back and forth just hoping that it won’t snap in two. But here I am offered high powered artillery that is specially designed to take down fortresses, arguments and anything else opposed to the knowledge of God. These weapons affect the mind and the heart and the end result is not the emancipation of an enslaved nation or the defeat of an evil dictator, the end result is obedience to Christ. That is, sinlessness.

 United Methodist Pastor, professor and author Peter Bellini wrote a book called the “X-Manual: A handbook on Deliverance and Exorcism.” When’s the last time you heard that term from the pulpit? Dr. Bellini takes very seriously the spiritual realm that surrounds us and he drives home the importance of the spiritual weapons we can use in our fight against sin, against the fortresses and arguments we make to justify sin.

 The first weapon at our disposal is prayer. Does that surprise anyone? The beauty of prayer is that it is available at any moment. There is no prep needed and no need to hesitate. God is waiting and listening.

**SLIDE 4: PAX**

This of course allows me to make a shameless plug for our P.A.X. teams, which meet regularly for the purpose of praying together. The acronym stands for Prayer Awakens Expectation and it’s all about us as a church putting ourselves in a position to obey God. I say it’s a shameless plug because, as a church, we need to be praying more. There’s no shame about it! We need to be making better use of this weapon that is so readily available and so filled with God’s power. And once we are praying more, well, then we can continue to pray more and fight for this church and this community and this state and this country! So join a P.A.X. team, get praying and wage war well.

 Our next weapon is the Word of God. The Bible is a supernatural book. It is not magical, it is not enchanted, but it is supernatural because it does not originate in humans. Natural men wrote it and they used natural ink and natural papyrus materials, but the origin of the Bible is supernatural, it’s out of this world. The words of God are also powered by God to take take down those things that oppose the knowledge of God. Read it, use it, every week we have a memory verse to help in that process so that knowledge of God and what he says might become second nature. God’s word written on paper does no good unless it’s also written on our hearts. It’s got to get in here! How does that happen? Through lots and lots of exposure and interaction. I’m talking about a verse tacked on to a devotional, not an occasional refresher. It becomes a powerful weapon through continued and sustained use. I share with you a method I stole from a book I read years ago.

**SLIDE 5: SOAP**

It’s called the SOAP method. So I will get a reading plan that takes me through the entire Bible in a year. Then I take a colered pencil and read through the passage for whatever day I am on. I will highlight one verse within that reading. Then I take a journal and engage the text. I jot down the verse I highlighted that is the “S” for scripture. The “O” is for observation. I note what I see about the context of the verse. Who is speaking, where and why. “A” is for apply. I write down some thoughts about how I might use this verse in my everyday life and finally the “P” stands for prayer, which ends my session. These steps allow me to not just read, but also digest and absorb the Bible. In this way, I am better prepared to use the Bible as a powerful weapon against my sin.

 Worship is another weapon at our disposal. Now, if pressed, I would have to concede that the term “worship” includes more than music and singing, but for my purposes on this list, I want to focus on the musical aspects of singing praises to God. Music is powerful. It affects the human mind, our emotions and even our will. We sing at important occasions, we rally support for a cause through music, watch any movie and you will hear included a soundtrack that is used to enhance and make more powerful the images on your screen. When it comes to music in church, we are so blessed every week to have a feast of songs that not only impact us sonically but that also steep us in truth lyrically. We may not love a certain song or it’s style, but all those question of preference are beside the point. Can we, regardless of our style, step into worship as a weapon and take hold of the very power of God.

**SLIDE 6: “In our worship, we are bringing the lordship of Jesus Christ over areas that have exalted themselves against the knowledge of God.”**

Pastor Chuck Pierce writes, “In our worship, we are bringing the lordship of Jesus Christ over areas that have exalted themselves against the knowledge of God.” That is the weaponry of worship applied to our lives. That is how the supernatural affects this natural world. Through our songs, we declare the lordship of Jesus! When it comes to the manner of our warfare, he writes, “We sing of those things that are not as though they are, again and again and again, until, CRACK!” By declaring what God desires as true in our worship (and our prayers) those fortress walls crumble under the weight of his glory. Those arguments that crop up to stand in the way are answered in the light of God’s presence. By singing of those things that are not as though they are we anticipate, we expect, we pave the way for God to work in our midst. We sing, “There’s nothing better than You.” Do we mean that? Maybe in that moment, but day to day we struggle to live as though God is our top priority. However, we proclaim the truth of what ought to be, and as we persist and take step toward that reality, we find that we have moved along the path. By employing this powerful weapon of praise, we have made inroads and progress before too long. And maybe the phrase, “There’s nothing better than you,” won’t be entirely, technically true in this like, but at least we will be well prepped to mean with every fiber of our being when we sing it for all eternity. I told myself long ago when I worked in a pipe-organ obsessed Presbyterian church, that I would commit to worship God in any context, whether the music was bad or great or somewhere in between. There have been times when I have had to be very conscious of that commitment. Times when I have had to purposefully set aside what my ears heard and focus on entering into worship as a God given weapon. And I just want to say I am so thankful and blessed that week in and week out, we get to sing and wage war under the leadership of Lars. There are plenty of talented people out there, but Lars loves Jesus and I believe that is what truly makes him valuable as a worship leader. So thank you Lars for serving to rally the troops here at Forest Hills.

**SLIDE 7: In the name of Jesus**

Another weapon we leave alone far too often is the name of Jesus. We typically pray in his name, and we sing worship songs in his name, but how often do we declare the name of Jesus as a weapon? This world and the spiritual one both operate under the paradigm of authority. In life, we understand who is in charge. Police officers are given authority to enforce consequences for breaking laws. Judges are given authority to sentence criminal behavior. Parents have authority over their children and commanders have authority over soldiers. The same is true in the spiritual realm. And there is only one King who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth…King Jesus. In Jesus’ name can demons be cast out. In Jesus’ name can sickness be healed. In Jesus’ name can an enemy of God become his child. In Jesus’ name can sin be forgiven. Jesus is our authority. He is the ruler of all and as his disciples on this earth, as his followers, we represent him, we bring his authority to bear. Jesus tells Peter in Matthew 16 that he has given him the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Imagine someone leaving you in charge of their mansion. You have the keys, you make the call about who or what comes in or out. The owner of that mansion must trust you in order to leave you with the keys. Jesus goes on to say, “Anything you fasten on earth will be fastened in heaven. Anything you loosen on earth will be loosened in heaven.” So Jesus’ authority is somehow shared with us as his disciples. We represent his kingly ownership. We would do well to wield it appropriately, to cast out the things of this darl world, and to shine light on the schemes of Satan. We have power in the name of Jesus. Amen?

 There are other weapons we could mention, and maybe we should, but I will give you one more. It’s a simple one, but maybe the hardest to pick up in the midst of battle…that weapon is repentance.

**SLIDE 8: Repentance “Pray for a holy hatred of sin. Pray to see sin the way God sees it. Pray earnestly for the gift of repentance. Ask and it will be given.”**

Repent, repeat, repent, repeat…that repetition slowly brings us into a new reality. When we stop and turn from our sin, when we ask God to forgive, as Jesus said on the cross, “It is finished.” That wrongdoing is no more, that debt is fully paid. When we repent, we break the authority that sin held in our lives. We get out from under the power of our sin. Repentance recognizes our sinfulness. There is no sugar coating here, there is no dodging guilt or casting blame, but there is one thing. There is a cross. And at that cross we lay down our sins, at the cross we put them to death. Thank God for such a powerful weapon! Dr. Bellini admonishes us, “Pray for a holy hatred of sin. Pray to see sin the way God sees it. Pray earnestly for the gift of repentance. Ask and it will be given.”

Like any weapon, these are more useful and more potent with use. We can’t just wield a weapon that is powered by God without some practice. Like a warrior who depends on his skill with a sword, we need to be able to handle these weapons well. Their use needs to become second nature. We ought to know how to handle the weapons God has given us. We need to wage war well! So invest the time and energy it takes to become proficient with these weapons.

**SLIDE 9: TITLE**

One more thought from Dr. Bellini as he echoes the apostle Paul, “Go to a cemetery! It’s full of dead people! Did you ever notice something? They do not sin. No matter how hard you tempt them. Dead people do not sin.” Do you consider yourself dead to sin? I want to encourage you to take up your weapons. Pray. Read your Bible. Worship King Jesus. And repent, repent, repent. These weapons are not of this world. They are imbued with God’s power. They are effective and useful for destroying the sin in our lives. Take up arms you warriors of the King and wage war well. Amen.