

Series: Battlefield:  
fighting the flesh, the world, the enemy  
6th Feb, 2022  
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Psalm 16  
Spiritual warfare

The year is 1939, Nazi Germany was on the move. Hitler was determined to bring Europe under its control. In confidence of their capabilities, they invade Poland and run it down. Britain under the leadership of Churchill was worried about how things were unfolding.

In their own empire, there was a new King. George VI, father to the current reigning monarch, Queen. Elizabeth. Only the King could make the decision the Government so waited for. They had found a great opportunity to force out the former King, His brother, Edward VII because they were unsure about his position on Nazis Germany, the enemy.

So early in his reign, a not very confident speaker now King, made this broadcast.

***“In this grave hour, perhaps the most fateful in our history, for the second time in the lives of most of us we are at war. Over and over again we have tried to find a peaceful way out of the differences between ourselves and those who are now our enemies. But it has been in vain. The task will be hard. There may be dark days ahead and war is no longer confined to the battlefield.”***

King George VI, of the UK, Dominions of British Commonwealth and Emperor of India.

And in that very moment, all of the British empires including Kenya was at war. The impact of that speech was not just a political or military reality. It was now the reality of the everyday lives of his subjects. He had warned them that the war would not stay on the battlefield where the trained fighters were, it would come to their homes too.

The lives of both young and old were about to change. The government now was acting under wartime laws. Even their expenditure moved more towards financing the war that Britain imported less food.

There was food rationing. An adult was allowed only one fresh egg a week for example. Everyone in the nation had to go through drills to be ready for what to do should there be an attack where they were. The UK was not only battle-ready in its military, the whole populace was war conscious.

And the impacts of that war had far-reaching consequences globally. Not only did it change global powers as the US and USSR became the dominant powers but even here at home in Kenya things changed. We had war at our door. The cry for freedom from colonialism grew stronger because of that war. And the movements of Freedom, like the MAU MAU, were emboldened.

In the 1950s, there was an influx of soldiers to Kenya who had fought in the second war to come to protect the settlers.

But the war here was not just confined to the forests where the MAU MAU were or in the corridors of power where Pan-African leaders lobbied. It was at home, in rural areas where mothers and wives had to hide their husbands and sons being hunted by the colonial powers. Women and children had to cook food and take them deep into the forest where all able-bodied men were required to be. As Kenya got into a state of emergency, no one could move freely especially not into Nairobi. Kenya was at war.

Welcome to our series on Spiritual Warfare. It will take us from now through Lent. Lent is the season that leads up to Easter where we focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus.

For generations, one of the key ways the church looked at the death and resurrection of Jesus was that at that moment, He was victorious. It is what they called *Christus Victus*. Which pretty much means Christ is victorious. Jesus had gained victory over the evil powers of this world and this age to liberate humanity. Which gives the impression of a war of sorts.

Sadly most of us have joined the army at a time of war and are living as if it is peacetime. We are at War!

Let's Pray.

How does following Jesus feel for you in this time and place? I don't know about you but for me, it always feels like great conflict. I learnt last week that the chair of the Atheist Association of Kenya wants churches fined for holding loud services. And I am not talking of such things as the war we are in. I think they are just keen to spark a culture war.

I mean even in very good times, why does it feel so hard to be faithful to Jesus? Or is it just me? Why does it always feel exhausting? Why do you feel worn down in your minds and battered and bruised battling to stay faithful and not give in to sin? Why does it get so hard to keep saying no to the things your friends or even family think are normal? And they cannot understand why you do not engage in them? Why does it feel so hard to keep being faithful even around things that a voice inside is telling you nobody has to know about?

If it has not been so for you, you have not been in Kenya long enough and know nothing about the problems Kenyans have with Subaru boys and their Naivasha escapades.

If it has not been so for you, congratulations, your sexuality, desires and appetites are in perfect check.

If you have not been there, you have not been to a government office and felt that you would lose your entire faith. They have a way of drawing out of you unprintables. You so badly wanted to cuss at the officer and could justify why you think they had deserved it.

Also, if it is not you, you have not met people then gotten convinced that surely they were animated by evil. Or you have not seen people get freed from demonic oppression and so you may think this does not happen.

Well if that is you, you do not need this series. But for the rest of us who nod yes to some of the things I have listed above or even all of them, I want to let you know it is probably because we are in spiritual warfare.

This is was Paul's experience too. When he writes this

***I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do,  
but what I hate I do.***

Romans 7:15

He was describing an all too familiar reality and it is because it is a battle. We are at war. And there are two sides to this war. We have an enemy, the enemy of our souls and we have Jesus, the saviour of our souls.

There is no uncontested space in the world. There is no neutral space in the life we live. You are either with God or with the enemy. Even when people say they are Spiritual but not religious, I have learnt it is Important to ask which spirits do they mean. Because there is no neutral space.

Here is how Jesus describes the contrast:

***The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.***

John 10:10

Here is how one of his disciples and early followers sees it and wrote about it

***The one who does what is sinful is of the devil because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.***

1 John 3:8

For Jesus and his disciples there seemed to be two different sides to this duel. You have an enemy and he is after you. You have a saviour and He is for you.

We much prefer thinking of following Jesus as a journey, which it is. But it is also a war zone. We are more uncomfortable with that imagery. But it is our reality.

I struggled with the title of today's talk because I did not want to strike fear. That is how much I am uncomfortable with the idea of war.

Yet our Spiritual ancestors did not share the same discomfort. They named this reality and often taught about it using war imagery and language. Now, remember these were followers of Jesus and leaders of the church and Jesus famously disarmed his disciples of swords. So it was not a war of guns, swords and punches, tanks and bombs but a war nonetheless.

Look at how Paul talks about it in his encouragement to a young pastor, as young as the majority of people in this church:

***But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith.***

1 Timothy 6:11

Or when he wrote to the church in Ephesus, he said to them to

***Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood***

***Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground,***

Ephesians 6:11-12, 13

We are at war. But for there to be any successful war strategy, you must know who your enemy is, and you must know his tactics too.

Imagine trying to fight a battle but you do not know who your enemy is. How then do you prepare properly? You could get ready for ground battle only to learn that your enemy is fighting from the air?

In the analysis of the war in Afghanistan, many have argued that what complicated the war for the USA was a sense of not knowing who the enemy was. Or even much about the enemy they were up against.

One true thing we can borrow from Sun Tsu's art of war is "Know your enemy".

And according to Jesus and the early church, we have an enemy, the devil. He has gone by different titles in the Bible. The Satan is one of them.

Actually, you will notice that there is never a name for him rather just titles. Almost like the Harry Potter style of 'he who will not be named'.

Some scholars argue that it is almost like saying that for Jesus he is not even worth naming but also in contrast that he is so evil that you dare not ignore him or take him lightly. We are at war.

And early church father's viewed this war as one against primarily 3 enemies of our souls; the flesh, the world and the devil: The flesh in the sense of, that part of us that is bent away from God. The world as structures, cultural patterns that are animated by the enemy to draw us from God. And of course, the devil, who is evil personified.

Here is Paul further on that matter:

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

Ephesians 6:12

One, he is telling them they need to be aware that there is a struggle, a war. But it is not against human beings.

The trouble with the culture wars and political struggles of our day is that they point to other people as our enemies.

Your struggle is not with your brother or sister or spouse. The real battle is not against the supporters of Ruto or Raila or Jayden. Your real struggle is not with your spouse. But there is something bigger going on.

And how does our enemy fight? An Important question because one needs to know their enemy and their technique. He lies. Listen, your biggest spiritual battle is not of demons flying everywhere or inhabiting things as some have made it to be: Not that the demonic is not a reality, rather they may not be the enemy's main scheme or tactical approach. The enemy's main tact is lies.

Jesus said of the devil that he is the father of lies and liars and he has been lying from the beginning.

How the devil fights is by telling lies that play to or are attractive to our disordered desires (our flesh) and these lies have been normalised in our sinful societies (the world).

So today we stop there. My desire is to awaken us to the reality that this is war. Spiritual warfare is real. There is no uncontested space. We need to stay awake and aware of the reality we are in.

I want to finish with good news. Jesus has already secured the victory. At the cross, as we begin our early journey towards Easter he declared it is finished. He declared his victory over sin, the devil and the world. And we are in Him. We have victory in Jesus.

This war is not of two equal sides not by any measure. Sometimes people overestimate or give way too much attention to the devil and his schemes.

They are not to be ignored because we are at war, but surely this is not an equal match. The devil has lost this battle and Christ has the Victory, and we do too in Him.

Here is how the story ends and has been completed:

***And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***

Colossians 2:15

For anyone who feels mentally exhausted and emotionally depleted. All who are weary and tired and aware of the pull and weight on your soul as you follow Jesus.

For those working out their salvation with fear and trembling walking daily in faithfulness. For those running to the feet of Jesus to receive grace when they realise in their unfaithfulness that we can only lean on God's faithfulness, hear today the word of the Lord, Take courage, for I have conquered the world.