**The battle for our heart – Part II**

Israel is important in the grand scheme of God.

We will again see that as we move forward in our message today.

The grand scheme of God to provide salvation and restoration to willing humans.

Christ is both the author of that salvation and the perfector.

**Hebrews 12:1-29 (NIV)**
1  Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

The cloud of witnesses, in fact, are those people of faith mentioned in chapter 11 – starting from the predecessors of Israel, to those from the nation of Israel who held onto their faith in the midst of trial, looking forward to that which you and I have access to today – such a great salvation.

So now, we have a great race marked out for us to run – our part in God’s plan

Here in the book of Hebrews, God, through Paul, talks about our role in the overall race that mankind is engaged in – as we march toward the end of the age

And we read that in this life and death race, we must see what could hinder us from finishing – and instead, run with perseverance.

2  Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

3  Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.
4  In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith

Author – of our salvation

Perfector – of our salvation as well

For, as we know, the work of salvation begins with our initial repentance and confession of Christ for our forgiveness from sin

But also continues in helping us change inside, so that we can defeat the work of sin in our souls – our minds, wills and emotions.

This is the sin that satan would like to entangle us in, to trip us up, or even to have us crash and burn.

Jesus overcame sin and endured the cross because of a joy that was set before him

We must also see our joy – set before us

Picturing us a part of the family of God, rejoined with Him, to rule and reign on the restored earth.

As the scripture in Hebrews goes on to say:

28  Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,
29  for our "God is a consuming fire."

We are receiving a kingdom – the kingdom of God

A kingdom is an authority

The kingdom of God is the authority of God

And Jesus said, when He defeated the devil and even overcame death and Hades – that “all authority has been given to Him”

Jesus has all authority – and the kingdom of God is where His authority reigns

In fact, Jesus ushered it in to the earth, and its final revelation will come when He returns

Until then, we, Christians, are God’s plan to extend this kingdom upon the earth

We do that by first extending God’s kingdom within us

Again, within our heart – the center of who we are

Coming to know and love God and therefore willingly wanting to do His good will.

**But we find that we have opposition.**

Today, we will see that, in this process of coming to know Jesus and having our hearts changed, we are in a spiritual war that will challenge us in the process.

To see the reality of spiritual warfare, we will look at the book of Daniel, written on the heels, so to speak of the other three prophets that we looked at a couple of weeks ago.

Daniel, as you may remember, was one of those Hebrews carried off to Babylon

God demonstrated through Daniel that while God was punishing or disciplining Judah, by allowing them to be taken captive, He had not abandoned them.

**In fact, to the faithful, He would continue to show Himself faithful.**

And as Daniel continued in his faithfulness to God, God demonstrated His faithfulness in giving Daniel favor and rescuing him and his friends. (Remember the fiery furnace and the lion’s den)

We also see Daniel’s heart for God and for his people, as Daniel, remembering the words God spoke through Jeremiah that after a period of time, God would bring His people back**, fasted and prayed for his people, even confessed his and their sin before God.**

**God heard Daniel’s prayer and sent the angel Gabriel to give him the answer to his prayer.**

Another time, in Daniel chapter 10, God gave Daniel a revelation which came to him in a vision and greatly disturbed Daniel, which caused him to mourn and fast for three weeks.

Again, we find that God sent an angel to give him the meaning of the vision. We read:

**Daniel 10:10-14 (NIV)**
10  A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.
11  He said, "Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you." And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.
12  Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them.
13  But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia.
14  Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come."

Daniel was called “highly esteemed" which is the translation of a Hebrew word that means “man of preciousness", and is also that word that the angel Gabriel used when greeting Daniel earlier.

This greeting again gave Daniel reassurance of the personal love and concern that God has for Him and for all of us.

God, who sees the heart, again saw Daniel’s heart **as he was crying out to God**, just as **He sees your heart and hears your heart’s cry.**

So God again sent the answer to Daniel through an angel

However, in this passage, we get a really interesting peak into the spiritual battle that obviously can occur, without us seeing it, in the spiritual realm.

We may not realize the mighty forces that are engaged as we seek diligently God and His will for us and our family and our nation, and the world.

**This passage will being new meaning to the scripture in James that speaks of the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availing much (James 5:16).**

But Daniel was told what happened in the heavenlies when he began **to pray** for understanding of God’s plan for Israel/Judah’s future.

We learn that when Daniel set his mind to understand and to humble himself before God, the Lord dispatched an angel with the answer

Note that God’s response was immediate

But, in this case, as the angel was on his way, the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted him for twenty-one days.

As we know that the messenger was God’s holy angel, the prince of the Persian kingdom also refers to a powerful spiritual being, either a demon, which is a fallen angel, or Satan himself, who is the chief of the fallen angels.

This demon is called the prince of Persia because he was assigned to bring demonic influence over the Persian realm.

In this passage we also see that these demons are engaged in opposition to God’s holy angels.

While we know that God can easily overcome any power of evil, including Satan himself if He chooses to, we see that at this time, God allowed this battle to take place.

**God has ascribed certain powers to both angels, holy and demonic, and humans, as we will see.**

The book of Job also gives us insight into this God ascribed power to Satan where we also see that Satan is not allowed to go beyond the limits that God allows

Interestingly, in our passage in Daniel, we see that Michael, called one of the chef princes, whom we know from other passages, as one of God’s mighty archangels who is Israel’s prince, shows up and helps the angel in this fight, which result in freeing the angel to come and deliver his message.

Interestingly, the angel later tells Daniel that he will return to re-engage in the fight with the prince of Persia.

Persia was a ruler of the world in that day.

This passage suggests that Satan concentrated demonic activity there, to influence the decisions made by the Persian government because policies made there would affect the world.

So perhaps, because Daniel was i**nterceding** for Israel, Michael was dispatched.

It is interesting to think that Israel has a mighty angelic supporters in the heavenly realm.

It is also interesting to think about our ability to influence this spiritual war for Israel, and their key place in end-time affairs **with our prayers for Israel and Jerusalem.**

**There is power in prayer**

**1 Peter 4:7 says**
7  The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can **pray**.

And as Satan continues to attempt to influence world powers and events**, our prayers are also key parts of the ongoing battle – in the whole world**

**This battle goes on for nations, as well as for families, and it begins in your own heart.**

In Ephesians 6:12, the apostle Paul said, “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.”

Karate stance – Elijah -

What would you do if someone began to push against you, attempting to throw you off a position that is rightfully yours?

 How would you respond?

Most people would lean into the weight and push back.

That's a posture of resistance.

 And as believers, we must know when it's time to lean with all our might against evil.

But how?

IN our passage in Daniel as well as throughout the whole New Testament, - Prayer is the believer's great privilege and powerful weapon against Satan and his plans.

The apostle Peter wrote, "Resist him, steadfast in the faith" ([1 Peter 5:9](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/index.php?version=49&search=1%20Peter%205:9)).

 James echoed this teaching:

"Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" ([James 4:7-8](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/index.php?version=49&search=James%204:7-8)).

Both of these godly men tell us to oppose evil.

And we do that by persevering in prayer.

On the surface, this form of resistance may appear to be passive.

But in practice, it is always active, intentional, and powerful.

Resistance begins with a decision to join the struggle against evil through prayer.

It takes patience and perseverance.

Peter and James point to two key words at the heart of our ability to resist the devil through our prayers:

faith in God and submission to His will.

**Submission**

Submission to God means acknowledging that we can't but He can.

In our prayers, we might tell the Lord, "I can't defeat the Enemy on my own. But with You, I can."

By taking this position, we join the apostle Paul in saying, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" ([Phil. 4:13](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/index.php?version=49&search=Phil.%204:13)).

James taught that submission occurs when we seek a closer relationship with God.

As we spend time in His Word and His presence, we get to know the Lord better.

We also discover how He wants us to overcome evil and experience blessing in our lives.

By setting aside time solely to listen and wait upon the Lord for direction and guidance, we grow closer to Him.

The better we know Him, the more we see His power, experience His love, and grow in faith and wisdom.

**Faith**

Faith can be summed up in the statement "God, I believe You will."

In our efforts to overcome the Evil One, we might pray this way: "I believe You will defeat the Enemy and cause him to flee from me as I resist him and put my trust in You."

But I want to call to your attention that the spiritual battle is focused on influencing the hearts of human beings.

That is to say, to influence the thoughts, motives, intentions and therefore the words and actions of people.

People in governments

People in families

You.

The real battle ground takes place in the heart.

Proverbs 4:22 says, “above all else, guard you heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

Notice it did not say, here’s one more thing to consider.

 It says, above all else, guard your heart.”

God is seen, as we have said, desiring to give us a good heart, after His own heart – a heart to know Him and love Him and do that which is right in His sight.

So our spiritual enemies are trying to thwart that plan of God, by trying to turn our heart hard and cold, and get us to act in selfish, sinful ways, even to the destruction of others, and ultimately ourselves.

Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”.

In Jesus name, whom has all authority (see Matthew 28:18), Satan and his demons can be bound so that the will of God can be accomplished – in us, and therefore in our families, in our nation and in our world.

Satan deliberately and systematically tries to build strongholds in human hearts.

These are strongholds of bitterness, strife, jealousy, offence, anger and even addictions

But we also see that God has given us weapons to fight this spiritual battle.

Back in Ephesians chapter 6, where we read about our spiritual battle, we also read about our spiritual weapons.

**Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)**
13  Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.
14  Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,
15  and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.
16  In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
17  Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
18  **And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints**.

Truth

Righteousness

Peace

Faith

Salvation

The Word of God

And PRAYER

We possess authority over Satan and the forces of evil.

We exercise that authority in PRAYER

**Even though victory is secure through Christ, it has to be won through battle.**

Each believer needs to be prepared for the fight.

Let us not be unaware of the devils schemes.

Let us understand the nature of the battle – for our hearts.

And what that means – the thoughts, motives, intentions that generate our words and actions.

**Let us give ourselves first to prayer, for we already see, that this is a key in the battle.**

We will realize that God is in charge of all that happens in our lives, and that we are in His Hands.

**But He has chosen to act in response to our prayers**

Prayer appropriates the victory that Christ won

*Fight your battles on your knees, and you will win every time.*

**When we turn to the Lord, we are no longer battling on our own.**

**Prayer connects us with the Holy Spirit and His power.**

**Gethsemane**

Life's great tests must drive us to prayer.

**We take our cues here from Jesus.**

Look at the language in verses 37-38: "He began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.'"

Can you imagine a sorrow so great that it was lethal?

A grief pressing so hard from within that he sweat drops of blood?

**Can you imagine such a distress that brought the sea-walking, storm-stilling, Satan-defying, death-deadening Son of God to groan under its weight and to plead to the Father in prayer?**

There will never be a weight that heavy for you or me to bear, but when our blow comes, when our midnight falls, when our enemies can be heard in the distance, before we do anything else, we must pray!

**Hebrews 5:7** **says, "He was heard because of his reverent submission."**

**Haddon Robinson has written, "Where was it that Jesus sweat great drops of blood?**

**Not in Pilate's Hall, nor on his way to Golgotha.**

 **It was in the Garden of Gethsemane …**

**Had I been there and witnessed that struggle, I would have worried about the future.**

**'If he is so broken up when all he is doing is praying,' I might have said, 'what will he do when he faces a real crisis?**

**Why can't he approach this ordeal with the calm confidence of his three sleeping friends?'**

**Yet, when the test came, Jesus walked to the cross with courage, and his three friends fell apart and fell away."**

**Jesus' victory in Gethsemane guarantees us his help in our darkest struggles.**

**Jesus wanted his disciples to stay awake and pray because the struggle was even too much for the Son of God.**

**And when they failed him,** **Luke 22:43** **says, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him."**

**But when we struggle, Jesus himself comes to us, by his Holy Spirit, to strengthen us.**

When Jesus told Simon Peter that Satan had asked to sift him like wheat, he also said, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

Simon Peter did not follow in Judas's footsteps because Jesus prayed that his faith would not fail.

In our daily lives – as we, one day at a time, seek to keep our hearts soft before God, striving to know Him better, and love Him more.

Allowing the indwelling Holy Spirit to work in us, to change our hearts – purifying them, replacing our old ways, with God’s ways – our old thoughts, with God’s thoughts, our half-truths and untruths, with THE TRUTH.

Praying for our hearts, our families, our nation and world