

“Strength to Stand”
Pastor John Bronson

(Ephesians 6:10-20)

January 16, 2011

Order of Worship for January 16, 2011
Pre-service Song
Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: (?)

Call to Worship: Psalm 84 and Prayer

Songs of Worship:

“Come, Now is the Time for Worship”

Overhead

“How Great is our God”

Overhead

“God of Grace and God of Glory”

Song # 435

“Shine, Jesus, Shine”

Song # 431

“Revive Us Again”

Song # 434

Offering and Offertory

Message: “States of Heart” (Ephesians 6:10-20)
by Pastor Bronson

All are urged to attend the baptisms following the service in the

Baptismal Hymn: “O Happy Day”

Song # 498

Parting Word of Grace

Evening Studies in the Word
Hebrews 3
5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Music Building

“The Prayer Closet”

January 16, 2010

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying for:

1. **Awana Missionaries: Joel and Virginia Cook**
2. **President Obama:** that the Lord will press home to his understanding the full weight of his responsibilities and possibilities; that the Lord will clear in Obama’s understanding His readiness to guide and strengthen him; that he will be drawn to truth and goodness and the Word of God
3. **Church Leadership:** that the Lord will open our hearts to His will for the church and our ministries; that the Lord will show us how to work together to increase the effectiveness of all; that we will be refreshed and renewed in the joy of the Lord and His salvation
4. **Military Personnel of the week: SPC Rebecca Wagenaar** (sister of Pam Cervantes): on active duty now, having problems with her back, please pray for healing.
5. **College Student of the week: Alyssa Holland at Butte College** (daughter of Fred and Diane Holland, sister of Kelsey) graduating in March, please pray for a strong finish and that she pass all of her cosmetology board exams

We continue with our study of Ephesians. The title of the sermon is “Strength to Stand”. If you will turn and look at Ephesians 6:10-20, you will be reminded of the centrality of strength in the conduct of the Christian life. We need strength to stand. Right at the outset Paul as he wrote to the Ephesians says, “*Finally be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.*” Paul, as we have seen before, comes now to the conclusion of his letter. He wants to make certain that the believers understand what they are getting into when they step into the Christian life. He wants us to understand that when we sign up to be in Christ, at the very same moment we sign up to engage in the warfare that is being conducted between Satan and God. That is the nature of the Christian’s walk; that is the condition of the Christian’s walk; that is the context of the Christian’s walk. It is important that we understand the nature of the warfare: what kind of struggle [is it?] What can we anticipate facing as we begin to walk faithfully? He tells us: we are going to face (verse 11) the schemes of the devil. That is the essence of the warfare. Jesus describes the devil in this manner; Jesus said that he is the father of lies. He was a murderer from the beginning. Those under the power, under the influence, those who are dominated by the devil or the prince of the power of the air (Eph.2:2) – under which the entirety of this generation and all generations of humanity since the Fall, all of them are under the power – how are they characterized? What Paul says is that they are deceived and deceiving (2Timothy 3:13). “Evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Paul’s reference to the powers and principalities that you find here at the conclusion of the letter – he says “...against the schemes of the devil, for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness...” that is his description in quick summary of what it is that we face. But if you are familiar with the letter to the Ephesians you know that he has already spoken of them in the first three chapters. As I mentioned before, as we take up and look at the whole of the letter of the Ephesians we begin to understand that Paul is saying the context in which we live out our Christian lives is under the hostile eye of deceiving forces who are generally under the direction of the devil.

Now we ought to stop and pause and think about that for a moment. If we believe that the Word of God, that the Bible is indeed the Word of God and tells us the truth about the way things are, is it not very interesting that in this age, now, the majority of people who are Christians in America no longer believe in the devil. Isn’t that convenient? Isn’t it convenient that the enemy of our souls has been able to work things in such a way that we no longer believe he exists, and therefore as not existing, we need not take guard against him? As Paul says, our attacker uses schemes and deceit. He tells lies. What better lie than to say, “Who me? I am not here! You don’t need to worry about me: I’m gone.”

There is more, of course, that Paul has to say to us – happily – about the nature of spiritual things than that we have a terrible enemy. There are two wonderful prayers that Paul wrote out in the first half of this letter. We looked at them before, but by looking at them now we might appreciate with a greater sense of urgency what they have to say to us about living the Christian life. Those two prayers are [found at] Ephesians 1:16-21, which we will look at now, and the other one is 3:14-19. These two prayers help us understand what it is we have to bring with us into this engagement with the enemy. Looking at Ephesians 1:16-21, this is the prayer:

“...remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him [meaning Jesus], having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him in the heavenly places, far above all rule and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

What a magnificent promise. He has assured us that God is for us and that the God Who is for us is above all other powers, and that from that God we are given the opportunity to receive wisdom. And that God directs towards us the very same kind of power that we see in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That is worth thinking

about; it is also worth asking the question: is this my experience? Is that the nature of my walk, my relationship with God?

We know that Jesus died for our salvation but we are not always clear in our understanding as to what is included in being saved. One of the questions I ask (I always encourage you to look at the questions I put in the bulletin [these are attached to the end of the text]; they are there to help you to track the message), is, what does it mean to say that I am saved, that I have received salvation? “Salvation” generally means well-being or good health. It can be applied to the individual, to the family, to the community or to the nation. We are told in the Old Testament that God worked out and offered salvation to Israel, the whole nation: well-being and peace and prosperity. Those are good things to desire. [Salvation] includes the sorts of things which can be gathered up under Jesus’ wonderful prayer. You might recall His disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray and He gave them what we call the Lord’s Prayer. Included in that prayer is this wonderful statement: *“Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”* If you ponder and meditate on that, which many have done through the years, you will realize that that aspect of the prayer really is entrusting all of our material needs to God, and all of our relational needs. We are placing ourselves under His kind hand and asking that He would take care of us, that we would have salvation from Him, that in our personal relationships, that in our social relationships, in our political relationships we would have peace and harmony and understanding. It is a good thing. This is what it means to be saved.

Of course we usually think more specifically in terms of the spiritual dimension of salvation, and rightly we should. So when we think about what it means to be saved spiritually most of us come immediately, rightly so, to the understanding that we are forgiven, that the offense of our sin in front of a holy God has been washed away, that we are accepted by God and that He loves us in spite of our failings. This is a glorious affirmation. We know that in addition what it means to have salvation or to be saved is that death has been removed from our future. We don’t face death, but rather we have received the gift of eternal life. So we are forgiven by God and we are accepted by God and we are given the wonderful gift of eternal life; we will be forever with God, and by the way with all of the company of those who believe and stand before us.

We also are told, we know, that as an aspect of salvation we have received the ability to not sin. We have not been guaranteed that we will never sin; we have just received the ability. Not only that but we have also received the ability to forgive others, to be free of bitterness. Not only that, but we realize that we have also been given the ability to love God. The person who is not saved is terrified of God, but you and I, because we know God in Christ, know Him as our loving Father Who has given an immeasurable gift, His Son, to clear away all offense and trouble between us and to draw us into a harmonious relationship wherein we can give our hearts’ gladness and thanksgiving for we love Him. We also know that a part of salvation is the ability to love our neighbors.

But the reality of most of us in our experience is that the further we move down that list, the more uncertain we are as to where things stand. This is very distressing to most Christians. It is distressing and we prefer to not think about these matters overmuch. But the reality of our struggles and our failures will not go away, and they whisper or they shout at us. They are a constant drag against our joy, our hope, our witness, and our faith’s resolve. The fact of the matter is we do sin, we struggle with temptation, we find that sometimes it is almost impossible to forgive others, and we feel distant from God. So, often times our walk of faith is marked less by joy and certainty and the sense of triumph than it is by confusion and depression and doubt. I talked with someone very recently going through a hard time in their life, and this is the word which came out of this fine Christian person’s mouth: “I think God is punishing me for my sins.” I said, “No! That is why Jesus died for you!” But I had to say it three times before I could penetrate that person’s misery and sense of alienation from God. Why?

Along the way questions begin to rise in our mind and often times these questions hammer at us, they hammer! What are those questions? This is the way I put them. Whatever happened to the joy of my salvation? Whatever happened to the glorious statement by Paul, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us?” Why do I feel all alone?

I have been a Christian pastor, a pastor (not all pastors are Christians, by the way) for a long time and I have had many conversations and I know the validity of those questions. So what has happened? Well, in one sense what has happened is really very simple: we have been deceived. My believing friend who had come the conclusion against everything that person knows about the faith was deceived.

We are not deceived, of course, by God. God doesn't deceive anybody. We are deceived by the deceiver. Now listen again to Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:16-21. He prays that, “...*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, and what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ...*” What do you do when you are down? Do you cry out, “Lord, help me! Remind me, refresh me, renew me, re-establish me, speak again Your word of truth into my mind, help me to keep my eyes fixed on the truth and not allow the adversities of my circumstances to alter my understanding of what is real. Do not let the deceiver take advantage of me.” Paul prays that the Ephesians might have a spirit of wisdom in knowing God and hearts enlightened so as to know the hope to which they had been called.

What is wisdom? Wisdom is the ability to apply the truth in practice so as to solve or achieve desired results. Wisdom is the ability to distinguish between what is truly desirable and worthy and what isn't. Wisdom is the ability to know the difference between what is profitable and what is fancy. Did you ever pray fanciful prayers? I do: perfect nonsense, of course. Something like, “I sure wish I could fly!” Did you ever pray a prayer like that? “I certainly wish I was never sick.” “I certainly wish that everyone in the world thought I was as wonderful as I think of myself.” Fanciful prayers are such as you soon realize and laugh at yourself – hopefully. Then again, there are wrong-minded prayers. Did you ever pray like this: “I wish so and so would drop dead!” That is a wrong-minded prayer! “I wish my professor had an automobile accident on the way to school so that I wouldn't have to worry about turning anything in.” That is a wrong-minded prayer. “I wish, God, that you would rearrange the circumstances of my life so that I don't have to be responsible.” There are also counter-productive prayers. I would call this a counter productive prayer: “I wish I could win the lottery.” “I am lazy, undisciplined, uncontrolled in my desires, spend more money than I have. What I need is the lottery. Vast amounts of money so that I don't have to pretend about anything. I could just spend without limit...” [But it would be] to the infinite rotting of their soul.” Wisdom in our prayers, enlightened hearts that understand the grace of God and His designs to strengthen the inner man, so that the inner person can stand fast despite every adversity.

We face a lot of difficulties even in so privileged a place as America. These difficulties, we need to understand, are not by chance, they are part of the set up. Against what do we contend when we seek to live the Christian life? We are going to really get serious about following Jesus. If we are going to throw off the lukewarm and the halfhearted and commit, what will we encounter? Well we will encounter first of all the weakness of our own flesh. How many of you have done this – don't answer me because I will laugh at you. “I am going to get serious about my walk with Jesus. I am going to get up every morning at 5:30 and I am going to have a 45 minute Bible Study!” On the third day we reconsider; on the fourth day we are not quite sure what we did; and on the fifth day, back to normal. But that is only one difficulty. There is the incomprehension of others. “I've committed myself: I am going to share the gospel with one person every day this week.” At the end of the week, having done it twice, you figure it is a hopeless effort. Nobody understands what you have to say. Then, of course, there is the outright hostility of some.

Just mention Jesus in some people’s presence, and it was like you poked them in the eye! Of course, like everybody else, we put up with all the adversities of nature. God does not arrange the patterns of weather or the movement of tectonic plates according to our convenience or preference. Just try being in Australia these days, if you are familiar with what has happened there. Then, of course, you and I live in a world of scarcity. We find ourselves willy-nilly in a situation of competition for scarce resources. I read a wonderful – I have not told my wife this yet, so maybe I shouldn’t say – I read an article yesterday in a fine magazine. This is what the article was explaining: why it is that it is almost a total waste of time to get a PhD, because every nation in the world practically now produces more PhD’s than there are jobs for them to get. Indeed the universities like PhD candidates because they use them as cheap teachers and cheap research assistants, and less than half of them get jobs. But do you know what folks? All of those are nothing compared to the deceiver of our souls. We need strength: the deceiver.

I want to very quickly address a question about Satan that was brought to my attention last week. I have told you to listen carefully to what I say because I will probably say something wrong every week, and it is good to have that pointed out to me. I want to address the issue of the power of Satan a bit more precisely as I stated last week. A very sincere and committed Christian came up to me and said, “What you said about Satan really made me nervous. It sounded as if Satan is equal to God!” Whoa, whoa, whoa! I apologize if anyone walked away with that impression. What I want you to understand exactly is that Satan is infinitely less than God. He is a creature made by God. Not only is that the case, but he is a defeated enemy. The Lord Jesus Christ defeated him. By means of love Jesus has conquered hate and life has triumphed over death. Satan’s power has been destroyed.

However, at the same time, I hope that I made the point, and I will make it again: Satan is more than you and I can handle [even in his defeat]. Don’t ever try and argue with Satan. James 4:7 says this, “*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*” Now some people I think take that as an invitation to enter into a debate! [That is] most dangerous. Therefore it would be wise to turn in your scriptures, please, to James 4 and look at the context of that statement. The context of the statement “Resist the devil and he will flee from you”, and indeed he will, and when you see what the context is you will understand why he will flee from you, because this is what James actually says. (This, by the way, is why always, when anybody comes up and hands you a verse, you say, “That’s wonderful! What was the address of that verse? Why don’t we read that whole chapter? Let’s make sure we have the whole chapter so I understand what the verse is really saying.” Verses taken in isolation are very convenient for every kind of purpose.) This is what James actually says in verses 5-8: “*Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, ‘He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us’? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. . .*” Do we get the picture in the context, why does Satan flee from you? Because you are hiding inside of God! That is why he flees from you; it is because you have taken protection under His outstretched arm. You are standing inside the radiance of His glory and you are saying, “Get out of here; I don’t need any shadows, thank-you.”

Satan always, always, always tries to draw us away from God. If he can engage you in a lively conversation about the Word of God, he will engage you. Don’t forget the little conversation that was recorded between Jesus and Satan after His baptism. Satan was very comfortable using the Word of God. Hide yourself in the Father. Don’t argue with Satan. Remember the promises.

Now hear the second prayer in Ephesians 3:16-19. I am going to begin at the sixteenth verse: “*. . .that according to the riches of His glory, God may grant you to be strengthened with power through His spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*” There is the substance, the whole substance of what Paul is referring to when he says that we need to be strong in the Lord and the strength of

His might. We need this at all times. I want to personalize this a little bit. I am a pastor; of course you know this. My obligation, my calling is the spiritual care of the congregation. Such care is to equip the believers to meet the challenge of daily life in a world that is hostile to spiritual truths and hostile to the reality of God as its Creator and Lord. Such pastoral care is warfare. I know that it is. Any pastor who is faithful to his calling is constantly engaged in spiritual warfare. What keeps one on track? What keep us from listening to the endless call of other voices? Hebrews 12:2 says this: keep your eyes on Jesus. Fix your vision on Jesus. He is the author and the finisher of your faith. Don't seek your own glory. He's done it. Rest in the certainty of all that He has done. Or look to Colossians 1:27. *“To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, Christ in you, the hope of glory.”* Our hope, my hope, is in Christ. It is not in you [the congregation]. My hope is in Christ, not those whom I serve. Consequently, I do not expect to receive that which will sustain me, nurture me, guide me from you; I dare not! For if I become your servant in that way, we are all lost. I must be the servant of Jesus Christ or we have no hope. But the deceiver would deceive us, all of us.

Today we have four people who are going to be baptized. Amen! It is a great moment. All four have an excellent testimony. They know the Lord Jesus Christ. Consequently it is already the case that the Lord Jesus Christ has received them from the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ takes them and gives them to the Father. This is done in the power and the glory of the Holy Spirit, poured out in their hearts, Who comes with the marvelous message of God's forgiving love. They shall never be released from His comforting grasp. You and I will listen to their words and celebrate the glory of God's grace as we hear their testimony of God's redemption in their lives. That should ring a bell of remembrance for all of us, to be glad remembering the goodness and the kindness and the generosity of our Father through His Son who has not only paid off all the offense of our sins present, past and future, but the Father gathers us to Himself that we might be one together with Him both now and for eternity.

Some of you know that my wife has recently gone through a hard time. I did not know how hard that time was until one day I was sitting in my study, which is a door away from the bedroom. She had gotten up. Suddenly I heard her simply burst into tears, she was in such great pain, and I did not that the pain that she was enduring was of such an extent. Why do I say this? She is well now, by the grace of God. We have talked about the days over this past year, and there are two things that I think it is essential to know. One is that so great has her pain been that she has forgotten many of the things that happened in those days. The other is, she never lost faith. She never assumed that God had abandoned her. She never assumed that she wasn't love by her Father. She knew. Do not ever let the deceiver slip his lies between you and His love.

Pray with me: Our heavenly Father, we understand, most of us certainly, the reality of what it means to walk as a believer in a world that is hostile to the faith. Father, we walk in the light of Your grace and truth. We walk as those who know Your love in Christ. We walk as the redeemed. So we give You thanks. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. When you say, “I’m saved” what are you saying about yourself?

2. What sorts of things tend to undermine our sense of well-being and lead people to doubt their salvation?

3. How does a person “draw near to God” and how does this relate to resisting the devil?

4. How did the serpent’s words alter Eve and Adam’s view of God? Have you ever been inclined to think of God in these ways?

5. Who does Satan most easily deceive? (see 2Thess.2:9-10) How does this relate to Paul’s comments on spiritual warfare in 2Cor.10:3-6?

6. What sort of things are schemes and who are those ensnared by the devil’s schemes? How should knowing this influence our view of others?

7. Do you agree that 2Peter 2:18-21 is a reasonably accurate picture of the average Christian?

8. Why is knowing “...Jesus Christ and Him crucified” critical for our spiritual well-being and strength day by day?

9. Do you tend to be an alarmist when confronted by the evil, corruption and lies in the world? Why is alarm the wrong response for a Christian?