

Fighting for the Peak

by Charles Anderson

Fighting for the peak means to strive for the highest and best that God has for us, even when it's difficult and requires a battle.

Duration: 49:38

Scripture: Daniel 10:5-12, Matthew 6:33, Ephesians 6:10-20

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker reflects on the concept of fairness and the challenges of preaching the word of God. The speaker shares a personal anecdote about his sons secretly recording his sermons to catch him in moments of unfairness. However, on one particular occasion, the sermon was fair and there was no need for the speaker to argue or shout. The speaker then transitions to discussing the biblical story of Daniel and how he prayed and confessed his sins before receiving a visit from the angel Gabriel. Gabriel informs Daniel that his prayers were heard and that he has come to give him understanding and insight into future events.

Transcript

Thank you, sir, for clarifying that matter of my skipping a chapter in the epistle. I thought afterward, perhaps some people may have thought he doesn't know how to count to have left one of the chapters out and yet have another session, but I do want to bring something different tonight in the closing message, and so you'll forgive us for just omitting that one chapter in the book of Ephesians. I'm asking you to turn this morning to the last chapter, chapter 6, and I wish to read, so that we may have it fresh in our thinking, the verses found from 10 toward the end of the chapter, Ephesians 6, beginning with the 10th verse.

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith you shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints, and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. I'll stop there. I didn't know how else to stop because Paul is inclined to write such long sentences.

And there's another long one, but at last you arrive at a period so you can stop. This thought just goes on and on and on. In this section of the epistle, and following out our little imagery that the book of Ephesians may be likened to the alpine peaks of Switzerland, it suggests to me, this particular passage, that if one is going to attain to the heights, that is, if you seriously determine that you're going to claim for yourself all that we've been looking at and observing and learning that is ours by divine right and promise, but if you seriously say, by God's grace, I intend to be dissatisfied with anything less than the highest and the richest experience God has for me, I want to warn you in advance that it will not be an easy thing to attain.

Mountain climbers soon learn that to attain a peak, often times, and I'm talking now about some of the mountains here in our eastern part of the country which we boldly claim are mountains, really become somewhat like foothills compared to some of the great peaks of the earth. I'm talking about one of the great mountain peaks, famous peaks of our world. They learn pretty soon that sometimes as they're observed down in the valley, they seem to be pretty clearly outlined, and they learn after a while to study very carefully the weather because when they reach a certain height, and sometimes it's almost at the peak, the mountains are a bit capricious, and they seem to say, I dare you to try to conquer me.

I simply dare you, and I'm going to make it difficult for you, and it isn't long before mountain climbers discover that the peaks are enshrouded with cloud and mist and fog, and sometimes what doesn't appear in the valley is true in the heights. It's a stormy brand of weather, and you have to fight in order to conquer foot after foot until you reach the peak. I don't know whether you have ever read the story of the conquering of Mount Everest by Sir Edmund Hillary.

Unfortunately, somebody loaned me the book in the evening, and I never got it. I couldn't put it down until about three o'clock in the morning. I simply was fascinated and hypnotized by the story, and I found myself so identifying with Hillary as he climbed Mount Everest that there were times when I was gasping for breath.

I found that it was hard to breathe because I was gasping along with him as the atmosphere became rare. I could feel the stinging blasts of the snows and the winds as they blew. It's a magnificent story.

If you want to get intrigued by it, get the story of the conquering of Mount Everest. Well, I say again, I think Paul is trying to warn us here in this passage that if we're going to attain unto the peaks, if we're going to dare to claim the very highest and best that God has for us, we must expect a battle. We must expect conflict.

It will not be easy. You remember maybe in the Old Testament that crusty old character, one of my favorites, Caleb, who the companion of young Joshua, when finally the land was conquered or nearly conquered, it came time to sort of divide up the spoils. And on his 85th birthday, in fact I was almost inclined to speak on Caleb tonight, but I thought you don't want to hear about Caleb tonight, you want to hear about something else.

But 85, I often say, when does life begin? Some people say 40, nonsense. For a lot of people, it doesn't begin until 85. Some of the most exciting experiences of one's life can yet be ahead.

It was so with Caleb. And Joshua, you remember, was portioning out the land and I imagine for his old crony's sake, he said, I've got a nice juicy piece for you, Caleb. You can retire there.

I'll call it Park of the Palms. And there you can settle under the palm trees. You can put your flocks out where there's abundant pasture.

There's a lot of water. You can take it easy for the rest of your life. He said that, I think, in between the lines to old Caleb.

And as I envisioned it, Caleb looked at him with a glint in his eye and he said, hold it, Joshua, just a minute. You remember when we were young and we came up here to spy out the land? I was only about 40 years old when that happened. Today's my birthday.

I'm 85 today. And I'm just as strong today as I was then. I think it was a little braggadocio, the old man.

He was bragging a little bit. But it's significant that no youngsters took him on. He said, I'm 85 and I'm ready to go in and out and I'm ready to fight too.

Don't you give me that soft chunk of land to retire on. Thank you for your interest. But I've had my eye on Mount Hebron.

I picked it out when I first came up here and I'm going to have that. That's my inheritance. And somebody said, but Caleb, don't you understand that that mountain that you claim for yourself is occupied by giants, the Anakins, the sons of Anak are there.

And that didn't make a single bit of difference to Caleb. He said, if so be the Lord is with me as he's been all along, I am able to drive out the sons of Anak. And he did.

He made Hebron his inheritance. He claimed it. He conquered it.

He occupied it, but not without a battle. He had to fight the Anakins and drive them out. And it's a strange thing, but in the Christian life, when one becomes serious about being all God wants you to be, and who wants to settle for anything less than that, really? But when you say, I will not settle for a mundane, ordinary kind of Christian life, unless that's specifically what God wants from me, but I want all God has for me.

I want all of that. And by His grace, I claim it. Then, friend, face this fact.

You will discover that maybe the greatest struggle of your Christian life will ensue. And Paul is here saying, I've shown you the peaks. Now, if you dare to climb these peaks and claim what's up there for you in Christ, you will find that you are involved in a vicious battle with a cunning, subtle enemy.

And that's why he implores them to put on the whole armor of God for this battle. Don't leave out a piece. And then, having done all, stand and remember the nature of your enemy.

There was a lady who wrote a remarkable exposition of the book of Ephesians. I think it's still in print. It was out for a while, but it's back in print now.

Ruth Paxson was a very gifted lady Bible teacher. In fact, she occupied the platform many times in English Keswick, and that was a great honor for a woman especially. But she was a very gifted lady, and she's written a book on Ephesians, which is a fine exposition of the epistle.

And the title is a little long, but she calls it *The Walk, Wealth, and Warfare of the Christian*. That's the title of the book. And her thesis is this, that we have an enemy who will oppose us at every turn of the road, our adversary.

And while we're here on the earthlies, and our life is in the heavenlies, then we have to face a very powerful foe. And what he will do is this. He will seek to decoy us from our walk.

And secondly, she says, he will seek to despoil us of our wealth. And at last, he will seek desperately to defeat us in our warfare. That's why she calls it *The Walk, Wealth, and Warfare of the Christian*.

Satan does seek to decoy us from our walk. He'll keep us from walking in love, from walking in light, from walking in truth, if he can. He'll find ways, subtle ways, to get us detoured from a straight walk.

And then he will also seek to despoil us of our wealth. He'll keep you poor if you choose to live a poor life. He'll rob you of your inheritance if he can do so.

He'll make you feel that you simply cannot have all these riches. They're not meant for you. And so he'll have you groveling in the dust when you could be living in the heights.

And then he seeks desperately to defeat us in our warfare. And it is a warfare that we're involved in. And here Paul says that it's a wrestling match.

And indeed it is. If you won't tell anybody, I'll tell you something. You promise? About me.

And I'm certain that I will now reduce whatever opinion you may have had of me another notch or two after I tell you this one little secret about me. Do you know what my favorite television program is when I look? The wrestling matches. Ah.

You say, how can you, sir? How can you? Don't you know they're fake? I know, but that's not ketchup that's running down their faces sometimes. And the gorier it is, and the wilder it is, and the meaner it is, the more I enjoy it. Now maybe it's because there's a streak in me of meanness that comes to the surface and I'm vicariously enjoying letting it out.

It's a horrible thing. I'm not encouraging you to look at the modern American wrestling. It's not wrestling.

It's mayhem. It is murder. And I must say seriously, I think there has rather recently been an injection of demonic activity and emphasis.

So I'm ashamed a little bit, but I still am fascinated. So much so that my boys on one occasion, and I argue with them. I say, give it to him.

What's the matter with you, referee? Are you blind? I'm talking to him on the television set. What's the matter with you, ref? Can't you see what he just said? Where is there fairness, man? And here I am preaching while I'm watching this misery. And so my boys got the notion, we've got to record this for posterity.

So they hid a microphone under my chair one night and ran a wire out there in the back and put a recorder on. And then they with glee sat out there and said, we'll get this and we'll play it back to dad. And he'll be so ashamed of himself, maybe he'll stop looking.

But at any rate, I sat there and there was silence, dead silence for 20 long minutes, which was unusual because I nearly always argued, shouted, and hurrahed when my favorite won and growled when my unfavorable won and all that. And they won all that. Why was it so silent? They peeked in.

They thought I'd fallen asleep. No, it happened to be one of those nice, clean Marquis of Queensbury rules matches. It was all fair.

There was no gouging. There was no miserable meanness. And so there was no point in saying anything.

And my poor boys got defeated in their subtle plot to record me forever in my meanest moments. But let me say something to you. This match, this battle that we're involved in and will be involved in in our Christian life is not an artillery duel.

It's not 30 miles away where you can't even see the enemy and you fire a shell and work it out, calibrate it, and hope that it will hit somewhere near the enemy, whoever he is, wherever. No, no, no. That's not the kind of battle we're involved in.

We're involved in a wrestling match. And the very word that Paul uses here, we wrestle not, infers all that is involved in the body contact, eye upon eye, muscle against muscle, bone against bone, where there's no holds barred. If anything, what is implied here is all the meanness and unfairness that is exhibited in our modern wrestling matches today is all involved here.

Make no mistake about it, my Christian friend, we're not involved in a Sunday school picnic. It's warfare. If you don't feel that, if you haven't experienced it, where have you been, soldier, when the battle's on? The minute you decide that you're going to do something unusual for God, the minute you say, I claim in Christ that, the enemy will say, try and get it.

I'm going to make it difficult, so difficult that you'll get discouraged and quit. The Christian life is not a Sunday school picnic. Indeed, it's a victorious experience, but it's a vicious battle against the ugly forces of hell.

Phillips, in his translation, says this, For our fight is not against any physical enemy, it is against organizations and powers that are spiritual. We are up against the unseen power that controls this dark world and spiritual agents from the very headquarters of evil. That's how he translates this passage.

It's frightening, frightening indeed. There it is, the P. Claim it, want it, listen to the howling winds, feel the bite of cold, gasp at the scarcity of oxygen. And just when you think you've made it, there's another blast against you.

And if you allow it, you'll get discouraged and say, I have to turn back. I can't do it. It's not for me.

I'll go back to the valley and live that ordinary kind of life that I've been living. No, you mustn't. We have to face the fact that it's a bitter and terrible battle.

Now, ladies and gentlemen, there's just a thin veil between us and that unseen world. Very thin veil. If now and again we feel we'd like to pierce it, and there's a whole vast universe of reality beyond our senses that

we sense here in this little sphere in which we live.

World rulers of this darkness, Paul calls them. Principalities and powers, he describes them. Spiritual wickedness in high places.

What a frightening description of our opposition. Now, the whole Bible, the Old Testament especially, will verify the reality of this thing. For a moment, may I ask you to go back to the book of Daniel where there's a rather remarkable revelation of the reality of what I'm talking about.

Daniel chapter 9, the chapter opens with Daniel exercised because while he was captured as a young man in his early teens, probably not more than 13 or 14, 15 years of age at most, captured and taken into Babylon when the Jews were dispersed under the Babylonians, he has lived all the way through the whole Babylonian regime. Nebuchadnezzar's son now, Belshazzar, he's fallen, and the Babylonian kingdom has now been taken over by a whole new dynasty. The Persians have dethroned the Babylonians, and that means that there's a whole new regime.

And Daniel's probably saying, we Jews haven't done too badly under Nebuchadnezzar, nor had they. They've been well treated. Daniel himself occupied a most prominent place in the politics of the Babylonian empire.

He was third in line, third ruler, a Jew, respected highly. So the Jews had fared pretty well. What was concerning Daniel now was, what's going to happen to my people under this new regime? How are they going to treat us? And so exercised, he found himself driven to two things.

When you become deeply exercised, you always seek out two sources of relief, the word of God and prayer. And so he opened the scriptures, and he was reading Jeremiah's prophecy. And when he read Jeremiah's prophecy, Jeremiah said specifically, at the end of 70 years, he named the number 70 years, the Lord is going to restore his people, bring them out of captivity, and bring them back to their land.

And as Daniel read that, he said to himself, you see, it was the 31st of December, I guess, New Year's Day was coming up. And he was saying to himself, wait a minute, how old am I? I'm 84, huh? 84. 14 I was when they captured me.

I've been here among these Babylonians for 70 years. That's exactly what the prophet talked about, 70 years. Oh Lord, you're letting me live to see the fulfillment of this prophecy? I'm going to see this literally fulfilled.

Are you going to do what you promised? Bring back your people? Oh, glory to God. But we're not worthy. And Daniel begins to pray.

And the first section of Daniel 9 is Daniel's prayer. And it's a prayer of contrition and confession and admission before God that this people, and he too, are totally unworthy of this mercy about to be exhibited. I used to take this prayer and make students in my class in homiletics in the Bible college, I'd make them read it, I'd assign them publicly before the whole class to see how they read this prayer, see where they could have put any meaning into it and so on.

And you know, friends, I want to say something to you, that when Daniel prayed this prayer, and there may have been long periods in between when he couldn't say anything, it's an emotional prayer. It is one of the most emotional in the Old Testament. He's crying out until he comes to the end.

Look at verse 19. Is this not a man in the agony of prayer who cries, Oh, Lord, hear. Oh, Lord, forgive.

Oh, Lord, hearken and do. Defer not for Thine own sake. Oh, my God, for Thy city and Thy people are called by Thy name.

Here's a man in agony. Now, maybe there were periods, many minutes in between those phrases, but you can read that prayer. If you don't hurry through it, no matter how slowly you read it, you'll never take more than 15 minutes to do it.

Never. In fact, you can do it in about five or six. Now, what happens? What's this all about? Well, Daniel's still praying before he gets around to saying Amen.

While I was speaking and praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people and presenting my supplications before the Lord my God, yea, even while I was still speaking in prayer, he emphasizes it, the man, Gabriel, whom I had seen at the vision in the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation, and he informed me and he talked with me and he said, Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplication, the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee, for thou art greatly beloved, therefore understand the matter, consider the vision. You've been wondering about the immediate future of your people.

I'm going to pull back the curtain and let you see the long range feat of your people. And there is now revealed in the next few verses one of the greatest, grandest, most important segments of Bible prophecy to be found anywhere in the Holy Word of God. That's 70 weeks of Daniel, see.

But, please note this, when Daniel started to pray, up in heaven, where is heaven? Is it a place? I am convinced that it's a place, as well as a condition. We have heaven down here on earth, a little kind of a smidgen of it, but it's still a real place. It's where God dwells.

I don't know exactly where it is. It seems to be, if we follow through Paul's experience, the third heavens where God's throne is, where he was caught up and saw things he wasn't allowed to write about and talk about. If that be so, it has been suggested that the first layer of the heavens is what we see when we move out on a cloudy day, the clouds, or on a clear night the stars up there.

And then beyond that is the second heavens, the planets and the stars, and somewhere beyond all of that is the throne of God. How far away is it from here? I don't rightly know. I haven't any idea.

But if it is beyond the stars, now we've got a staggering thought. Gabriel is God's Western Union boy. Did you know that? He runs errands for the Lord.

Whenever God wants a special errand run, Gabriel, are you ready? Boom, he's off and running. And God gave a commandment. Daniel prayed down in the palace, and God heard up in heaven, what's the fastest thing known to man? They tell us it is the speed of light.

And how fast does light travel? A little bit more than 186,000 miles per second. And it went 186,000. Multiply.

If you want to know how far a beam of light travels in terms of miles per year, you've got to get a big piece of paper and start multiplying. You take 186,000 and multiply that by 60, and then multiply that by another 60, and multiply that by 24, and then multiply that by 365, and you'll come up with 5,865,696,000,000

miles. That's how far in terms of miles a beam of light travels in one year.

And now the astronomers come and tell us that the nearest fixed star to us is 40 light years away. So that's 186,000 times 60 times 60 times 24 times 365 times 40. But they say that's so close, if you're not careful, you'll get starburn.

And so they tell us that out there are some stars that are 500,000 light years away. How far is that in terms of miles? That's 186,000 times 60 times 60 times 24 times 365 times 500,000. Pretty far.

And Gabriel is there, and Daniel says, Oh God! And God heard him right away. The fastest thing known to man is not light, it's prayer. Prayer.

God hears in heaven right away. Even a feeble cry He hears. But here's the fascinating thing.

In the ninth chapter of this book, Gabriel comes all the way from God's side to Daniel's side in less than 15 minutes. Man, that's moving. That's moving.

Turn the page to chapter 10. A vastly different story. In chapter 10, you have Daniel in trouble.

It's the third year now of Cyrus, king of Persia. And God reveals something to Daniel. And Daniel 10.2 says, In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks.

I ate no pleasant bread, no flesh, no wine was in my mouth for 21 days. I didn't anoint myself till three whole weeks were fulfilled. Then I lifted up my eyes, verse 5, and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, loins, and he describes him right on down.

And what does this man do? Verse 10. A hand touched me, set me on my knees, on the palms of my hands, and he said, O Daniel, man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand up now, for I am sent to you. And when he had spoken this word, I stood up trembling, and he said, Don't be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you did set your heart to understand and to chasing yourself before your God, thy words were heard.

Same principle. In the ninth chapter, as soon as he opened his mouth, he said, O God, it was heard. In the tenth chapter, when he began to pray, your words were heard.

But, big difference, what's happened now. But, the but's of the Bible are most interesting. Here's an interesting one.

But, the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days. How long was Daniel in agony and fasting? Twenty-one days. Three full weeks.

Why that extended period of time? Because the messenger who was sent from God to earth to speak to Daniel and reveal things to him ran into trouble. He ran into difficulty on the way down. He, the prince of the kingdom of Iran.

Could that have been the Ayatollah? No. But, another Ayatollah, maybe. The prince of the king or the prince of Persia withstood me twenty-one days.

And, I had to call on help from heaven. And, Michael, one of the chief princes came to help me. And, I remained there with the kings of Persia.

Now, I've come to make you understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days for yet the vision is for many days. The message was so important that was being delivered from heaven to earth that the forces of hell marshaled themselves to oppose it and to keep it from being revealed on earth. And, so, a prince of Persia withstood a heavenly messenger sent to bring this special message.

Question. Do you think that prince of Persia was a human being? Before you answer, let me give my answer. No.

I can't conceive of any powerful prince on earth having the ability or the power to withstand and oppose an invisible, heavenly messenger of God in any way, shape, or form. Then, who is this prince of Persia? Oh, because, look, at the end of this passage in verse 19, he tells him, Peace be unto you. Be strong.

Be strong, Daniel. And then, when he had spoken, he said, Know this. Do you know why I came to you? Now I have to return and fight with the prince of Persia.

And when I am gone forth, lo, the prince of Grecia shall come. What is this? Kind of mysterious. Yes, it is.

What he's saying is this, that as I came from heaven, this is what I construe. He says, As I came from heaven, I had to pass through the aerial portion dominated by an unseen, powerful, demonic prince. The aerial portion over Persia.

I have to go through his portion again and I'll have another battle on the way back. And then the prince of Greece will come in and maybe help him to oppose me. Do you know what? When you add this to some other things that are found in the Bible, I said there's a thin veil between us and that powerful real world out there just beyond us.

There was a day when the sons of God presented themselves to the Lord and among them, the powerful prince, Satan. And you remember, he taunted God. God said, What have you been doing? I says, I've been walking to and fro on the earth.

God says, Have you considered my servant Job? I said, Yeah. You mean that spoiled brat you've got down there? You know why he trusts you. You're spoiled to death.

And furthermore, you won't let me touch him. You've built walls around him. You let down those fences and I'll show you.

He'll curse you to your face. And that's what the whole book of Job is about. To prove that the devil is a liar from the word go.

And that God can really win a victory on the battlefield of the human life. That's what the book's about. But who were these heavenly beings? Then you remember, there was another time when King Ahab, that wicked man, that awful man, he was not only wicked, but he made a terrible thing.

He married a woman, Jezebel. When you get Jezebel and Ahab incorporated, you've got yourself a terrific mess. And Ahab was ungodly, but you remember, he was going to have a fight with the king of Syria.

And so he called on the king of Judah, Jehoshaphat, and said, hey, how about helping me out? And poor old Jehoshaphat, who was already a compromiser in many ways, he said, well, my people are like your people. My soldiers, your soldiers. My horses, your horses.

You do anything you want. Sure. Well, then he said, we're going up.

We're going to attack a certain area and we'll see what we can do. We're going to turn the ears back of this man from Syria. I'm sorry I'm treating the Hebrew so loosely this morning, but this is what I see.

And Jehoshaphat says, just a minute before we go, can't we get a word from the Lord to tell us whether He's going to bless us in this venture? And you remember King Ahab said, oh yeah, I've got lots of prophets. They're on my payroll. So he got a hundred of them.

And they all came and he said, shall we go up and attack this area? Am I going to be successful? And they said, oh yes, King, God bless you. Go to it. The Lord's with you.

A whole hundred of them. And Jehoshaphat had still enough little bit of spirituality left in him. And you remember he said, don't you have a real prophet of God around somewhere? And then Ahab reveals, yeah, there's one.

His name is Micaiah, but I hate him. That's what it says in the Word of God. I hate him.

You know why? He never says anything good about me. Never. I don't want him.

Jehoshaphat said, well, let's get him anyhow. So they sent down to where Micaiah was living. And the messenger that came down said, look, I know that you are a fighting fundamentalist.

I know that. And you are noted for bringing bad news to the king. But please, this one time, you got Ahab and Jehoshaphat together.

And all the prophets are saying, go, go, go. God bless you. Just for once, why don't you join the majority and say, God bless you.

You remember what Micaiah said? He said, what the Lord tells me to say, I've got to say. So they brought him down. And when he got there, they said, what do you say, Micaiah? And here sits the two kings.

They found an open spot in the gate, the Sumerian gate. And they're sitting there with their robes on. And they bring poor old fundamentalist prophet Micaiah there.

And they said, what do you say? Shall we go up? Will the Lord bless us? And he looked at the kings and he said, yeah, go up and the Lord bless you. And Ahab said, see, didn't I tell you, Jehoshaphat, this guy never says anything good about me. No matter what Micaiah said, he wouldn't have won.

If he said, don't go, the king would have said, I told you so. When he said, go, he said, he's not telling the truth. I know it.

Well, then when he opened his mouth and began to tell Ahab what he actually did was to spell out the death sentence of Ahab. He said, I saw in a vision the children of Israel scattered like sheep. You know what was the matter with them? They lost their shepherd.

That's you, Ahab. You're finished, my friend. You're not coming back alive.

And furthermore, you know, in my vision I saw something else. I saw the heavenly host marching before Jehovah God and God said, how can I defeat Ahab? Anybody got a suggestion? And one of those heavenly beings stepped up and said, Lord, I know how to do it. I'll put a lying spirit in all his prophets and

they won't be able to tell the truth.

And that's exactly what happened. That story's there in 2 Kings. Read it for yourself.

Fill in the nice biblical details. But what impresses me is that there was a parade in heaven of all kinds of spiritual beings and among them one who probably was an evil spirit who was sent forth to put a lying mouth on all the prophets of Ahab. So the Old Testament is replete with examples of the reality of these evil forces which Paul says we shall be in conflict with if we seek to gain the heights.

There was a book published some years ago, I think two, it is now back in print and I'm glad that it is. It was written by a man named G.H. Pember and titled Earth's, then, I don't know what the title is under the new publication, Earth's Earliest Ages. Remarkable book.

And there's a paragraph in that book that I want to read to you. He says, The startling suggestion from these and other passages of Scripture indicate that all the worldly rulers of earthly kingdoms, whether conscious of it or not, are directly under the control and in the hands of Satan. Did you get that? All the worldly kingdoms, the United States, I don't know who the evil prince is who's in charge of the USA, but there's one.

And Britain, and Canada, and Mexico, and down the line that apparently every one of the earthly kingdoms has set over it in that structured kingdom of Satan a special power, a special wicked spiritual empathy that keeps interfering in the affairs of that nation. That's a sobering thought, you know it? And so he goes on to say, When we are saved, we become part of a special people who were delivered from the jurisdiction and kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Of course, this incurs the deadly hatred and enmity of our former master who is constantly moving or making a bid for the return of our vassalage.

Then he adds, The whole area surrounding our planet is densely populated with a hostile race of beings unutterably superior in wisdom and power to ourselves. Having, during a vast number of years, every conceivable experience of the weak points of humanity, possessing the incalculable advantage of being themselves invisible, though, as spiritual intelligences, they are probably able to judge of us by our words and outward actions, and cooperating with a most perfect and never failing organization, and lastly, directed by a leader of consummate wisdom and skill who is assisted by powerful princes and finds his subjects so numerous that if we are able to lay any stress on the word legion in the memorable narrative of Luke, he is able to spare some six thousand of them to guard one miserable captive. Staggering thoughts, that.

And we make a grave mistake if we underestimate the magnitude and the power of the enemy with whom we are engaged in this spiritual battle. We must not underestimate his subtlety nor his purpose. That's why Paul says, Brethren, take on you the whole armor of God because we're wrestling against spiritual wickedness in high places.

We're in a wrestling match against the evil forces of hell that will throw every roadblock in the way of our spiritual progress. I think the early believers in the early church seem to have this clearly fixed in their mind. That's why when we read the records of Christian experience in the early centuries, they have a far more sober note to them than contemporary records.

We're only concerned about happiness. Are we happy? What in the world difference does it make whether you're happy or not? Happiness has got nothing to do with it. Happiness is a pure surface thing.

The believer in Christ has something far more valuable than happiness. He has joy. Joy! That goes way down to the bottom rock thing.

It doesn't make any difference if the surface is being blown by storms. That will disturb your happiness. But it can't rob you of your joy in Jesus Christ because that's a deep abiding thing.

Well, on this note, I want to close. And it's a somber note, I admit. Unless you go out saying, oh, I'm so depressed this morning.

He took me down. I don't know. I feel... Well, there's a verse I want you to take with you.

Greater is He that is in us than he that's in the world. Oh, that's beautiful, isn't it? We're not on the defeated side. We don't fight for a position of victory.

We fight from a position of victory. We're already more than conquerors through Christ. William I of England bore a worthy title which has been handed down to us and forever associated with his name.

In 1066, William of Normandy then pressed his claim to the crown, you know, at the Battle of Hastings. And from that point onward, he was not only known as the King of England, but history records him as William the... Ah, isn't that interesting? William the Conqueror. That's the title we bear.

William, Mary, Samuel, whatever. The Conqueror in Christ Jesus. Oh, glory to God for that.

Let me conclude with this. You've heard me mention the fact that I've spent a great deal of time in Switzerland. The fact of the matter is this past year we made our 18th visit to the land of Switzerland.

So I love it and know a lot about it. One of the little things I find myself doing is this. Near one of the great mountain peaks like Mont Blanc at Chamonix or Matterhorn at Zermatt.

You'll discover in the little villages clustering around the foot of the mountains there often are buried people who died on the mountains, whether guides or climbers. And if you spend a little time in those little cemeteries, you can learn a little bit about some of that history. And quite often you will find lying right out in the open where you can pick it up and handle it will be the pickaxe that was used by a now dead and buried guide or climber.

And then the epitaphs on the stones are most fascinating. And I recall a couple of them. Down at Zermatt, for instance, I saw in a cemetery a very wonderful epitaph.

They usually just give the name of the guide and the date of his birth and the date of his death and then a little epitaph. And this one says, I chose to climb. Isn't that great? I chose to climb.

He deliberately picked the peaks and said, I choose this. I will climb. And then over at Chamonix, I wandered through the cemetery there and I saw another one.

And it said, there were two there in fact. One said, I scorned the lesser peaks. Great.

I scorned the lesser peaks. That means he chose the high ones, the difficult ones. But the one I like the best is the one I find at Chamonix that says, here's his name, here's the date of his birth, his death, and it

says, he died climbing.

You know where his face was when he fell? Toward the peak. Not toward the valley. He didn't make it to the peak, but he was on his way.

Maybe some of us will not make it to the peaks. But wouldn't it be wonderful if your epitaph was, she died climbing. I know a lot of saints whose epitaph ought to be, he died reclining.

You know, taking it easy. No. The peaks are ours.

Sure, it's going to be a struggle to reach them. Yes, the forces of the enemy, strong, mighty, but victory is assured and this belongs to us in Christ. Climb, friend! You may die climbing, but you're on your way.

Now, Father, we thank Thee this morning for the assurance of victory that we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. We read of the overcomers that they overcame Him by the blood of the Lamb. And so do we overcome our enemy by Thy victorious, atoning, cleansing, all-powerful shed blood.

And we lay claim to victory once again from the cross against our enemy. O God, help some of us who may have been discouraged and defeated

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