

The real conflict behind events we experience, is won in a different way

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

"Be strong in the Lord" – being strong humanly is not enough. Recognise the need to summon God's invincible power.

11 Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

"Put on" – earlier in the letter Paul has written, "Put on the new self" Eph 4:24, also Col. 3:10 i.e. the new attitude of who we are in Christ, born anew into true righteousness and holiness. This is countering false witness and fear in the opposite spirit of integrity.

"The devil's schemes" – the Bible is clear about the reality of the devil, a personal enemy, who deploys a few predictable strategies to exploit sin, fear and guilt by using accusation and division. Knowing those strategies is how we recognise their origin and overcome them.

12 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.

"Our struggle" – it is a mistake to resist human opponents or institutions without recognising the dark spirituality that is manipulating them, and taking a spiritual stand in the authority of Jesus. Those who know the Lord may still have remaining vulnerabilities that the different levels of spiritual opposition are able to exploit.

13 Therefore put on the full armour 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.

"Full armour of God" – like the 'panoplia' of the soldier's kit, but referring to Yahweh's armour and weaponry, Isaiah 11:4-5, 59:17, made available to the believer. When evil seems to prevail, truth and righteousness are the spiritual 'weapons of character' that win through.

"Stand" – repeated four times in this passage for emphasis. Rather than invade the domain of evil, we are to firmly maintain the decisive victory already won by Christ, Eph. 1:20-22, 4:8, Col. 2:15.

IN PRACTICE The spiritual connection between heaven and earth is real and active, and that is made explicit here. Struggles are real experiences -- our lives are under attack, both in the fears and anxieties and negativities that assail our thoughts, and in all the practical difficulties, health issues, relationship conflicts, adverse weather and accidents. The devil and his minions are personal opponents, always working to steal our peace and cause division wherever they can gain a foothold. The world's advice is to be strong. Money in the bank, a robust constitution, influential friends... life has taught us how to 'tough it out'. And this is exactly what we have to 'unlearn'. This clear lesson from Paul's teaching is that to prevail, is to prevail spiritually. It requires us to put down our worldly 'weapons' in order to take up a very different set of spiritual ones, where growing holiness, integrity and trust in God in the face of difficulty are the very qualities feared most by our spiritual opponents.

QUESTION What makes it difficult for us to take up spiritual weapons? What in Christian life and fellowship helps us to see the spiritual dimension?

PRAYER We live in a cruel and difficult world but so, Lord, did You – and we put our trust in You. Help us to perceive more clearly the spiritual realities behind our lives and to constantly give You the lordship, and praise for Your sacrificial victory. Amen.

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Church calendar readings for Sunday, August 26, in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **Living in the connection between heaven and earth**

1 Kings 8:1,6,10-11, 22-30, 41-43 » God presences himself in the glory cloud

John 6:56-69 » Jesus promises Himself as food for eternal life

Ephesians 6:10-20 » How we position ourselves in the spiritual battle

1 Kings 8:1,6,10-11, 22ff » God presences himself in the glory cloud

The reverent placing of the ark in the temple

1 Then King Solomon summoned into his presence at Jerusalem the elders of Israel, all the heads of the tribes and the chiefs of the Israelite families, to bring up the ark of the Lord's covenant from Zion, the City of David.

6 The priests then brought the ark of the Lord's covenant to its place in the inner sanctuary of the temple, the Most Holy Place, and put it beneath the wings of the cherubim.

"Ark... to its place" – moved from David's shrine into the temple, probably in the 12th year of Solomon's reign.

10-11 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord, Yahweh, filled His temple.

"The cloud" – The presence of the Lord appearing in a visible cloud, as at Sinai.

For further study, Exodus 24:15-18; Exodus 40:33-38; Numbers 11:24-25 and 2 Chron. 7:1-3.

22-23 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in front of the whole assembly of

Israel, spread out his hands toward heaven and said:

"Lord, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth below - You who keep Your covenant of love with Your servants who continue wholeheartedly in Your way.

"No God like You" – Yahweh was quite different from the impersonal, fickle deities of other nations, directing events to fulfill His covenant promises. See Exodus 15:11, Deut. 7:9,12, Psalm 86:8-10.

"Covenant of love" – Hebrew berith chesed, covenant faithfulness. This is what made Yahweh unique and different. There was, however, responsibility on the other party to "continue wholeheartedly" in His way.

24 "You have kept Your promise to Your servant David my father; with your mouth You have promised and with Your hand You have fulfilled it - as it is today.

25 "Now Lord, the God of Israel, keep for Your servant David my father the promises You made to him when You said, 'You shall never fail to have a successor to sit before Me on the throne of Israel, if only your descendants are careful in all they do to walk before Me

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faithfully as you have done.'

"If only your descendants are careful" – a clear, unambiguous condition amplified in the "But as for you... but if you" statement of 2 Chron. 7:17-22.

26 "And now, God of Israel, let Your word that You promised Your servant David my father come true.

27 "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!

"How much less this temple" – the physical temple and cloud of glory led to the false belief that God's assistance was assured however people lived, Jer. 7:4-14, Micah 3:11.

28 "Yet give attention to Your servant's prayer and his plea for mercy, Lord my God. Hear the cry and the prayer that Your servant is praying in Your presence this day.

29 "May Your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which You said, 'My Name shall be there,' so that You will hear the prayer Your servant prays toward this place.

30 "Hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they pray

IN PRACTICE Solomon and the priests involved in the consecration of the new temple had never seen the glory cloud, but they knew about Moses entering the cloud on the top of Mount Sinai to receive the commandments, and the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle tent. For the people of the Old Testament era, the relationship was remote, not personal, with prophets and priests speaking for God and acting as His intermediaries. However, our relationship through Jesus is to be personal, not mediated through priests. The story sets out a scenario where the affairs of heaven and of earth are not separate, but closely linked.

QUESTION *How is God's covenant of love distinct from other world faiths?*

John 6:56-69 » Jesus promises Himself as food for eternal life

By receiving Him totally our lives are transformed

56 "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in Me, and I in them.

57 "Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one

toward this place. Hear from heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive.

"Toward this place" – Israelites who could not pray in the temple directed their prayers to the temple, the place where God has promised to be present among His people, e.g. Daniel 6:10.

41 "As for the foreigner who does not belong to Your people Israel but has come from a distant land because of Your name...

"Foreigner" – not an alien living in Israel but someone who has journeyed to Jerusalem to pray to Israel's God.

42 "...for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm – when they come and pray toward this temple,

43 "then hear from heaven, Your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as do Your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears Your Name.

"All peoples of the earth" – the wider intention of God's mission, here plainly stated in the OT.

who feeds on Me will live because of Me.

"Feeds on Me" – as John Wesley put it, Jesus becoming the meat and drink that feeds the soul. The Hebrew idiom 'flesh and blood' refers to the whole person.

58 "This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna

and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

"Whoever feeds...live for ever" – clearly not to be taken literally, and at this point no sacrament has been instituted. Eternal life comes from believing in Him wholeheartedly by internalising who He is.

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?"

61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you?"

62 "Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before!

"Ascend" – to the realm He came from – harder to comprehend than Jesus offering Himself for them to feed on spiritually.

63 "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you – they are full of the Spirit and life.

Jesus' hearers, not discerning the spiritual truth behind His words, were shocked and offended. The Jews believed that study of Scripture and 'doing works of God' were enough for spiritual understanding. Jesus is patiently explaining that the Holy Spirit is needed to provide revelation that human reason cannot, John 5:39, 6:27-29.

IN PRACTICE Jesus reminded His hearers of the manna, God's day by day provision from heaven for His people dwelling in a desert. Then Jesus challenged them with a steep step of logic – now God's 'manna' from heaven was He Himself. He was God's provision to them for life, and indeed eternal life, and they were to feed on Him by taking Him to heart.

We live on earth in an awareness of God – and through Jesus this becomes a real and personal relationship with Him. But we still see a gap between what happens in heaven and what happens, good or bad, in our earthly lives. This teaching of Jesus reminds us that He is the connection. To the extent our lives are lived in Him, and we are placing ourselves under His lordship, what is played out before our eyes is harnessed to the hope we have in the heavenly realm.

QUESTION *In a practical, day to day way, how would you explain what it means to you to 'feed on Jesus'?*

64 "Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him."

65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless the Father has enabled them."

"The Father has enabled" – only those who seek on God's terms, and not their own, will receive. Jesus knew some, choosing not to believe, would not be drawn by God – a fine balance between the free will choice, and being drawn to a choice by the Holy Spirit.

66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.

"Many turned back" – Jesus is not surprised that many potential disciples have turned away at this watershed point.

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

68-69 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that You are the Holy One of God."

"To whom shall we go" – the disciples are starting to get the teaching that others find too hard. They don't want to transfer to another rabbi.

"Holy One of God" – God was called the Holy One of Israel, e.g. Psalm 71:22, Isaiah 43:3, 54:5.