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Guest Speaker: Nancy Vamvakas
A BATTLE TO FIGHT!

Good morning!

How many of you are diligent news readers or watchers? Let's get a handle on where people are.

How many people are news junkies and need to get the full news every day?

How many people get the news 2-3 times per week?

How many people avoid getting any news at any time because it is just too depressing?!

I have to admit that I am one who avoids the news because I find it too depressing. I listen to 680 in the car a couple of times a day, mostly for the traffic and weather, figuring that I can only handle about 5 minutes of news each day.

Are any of you like me and when you watch the news you wondered what is wrong with this world? Why so much crazy stuff happens that doesn't make sense? Do you ever find yourself feeling discouraged by the world, helpless even? I have. I have to admit, I will sometimes wonder where God is in all of this.

Over the last 5 years, I have been studying at Tyndale Seminary and in the last year have taken a few courses that were particularly helpful in giving me a better perspective on these types of questions. I would like to share 3 things I have learned in the last year.

Before we get into it, let's pray.

Our Father in Heaven;

We thank you for this morning, and for our chance to come together, in your presence, and worship you for who you are and what you have done. It is our desire to worship you in spirit and in truth, and I pray you will use me to share both this morning. Teach us this morning, as we come with our questions and our anxieties. Thank you for your faithfulness to help us. Amen.

Overall, I have learned that my struggle with some of these questions was happening because I didn't have a BIG enough perspective of the world. I had made everything too small – I made God's creation too small, I made the impact of our sin too small, and I made God's plan to rescue us too small. In making things too small, I have diminished our awesome God. This morning, I would like to share my journey on right-sizing my perspective of God with you. Will you take this journey with me this morning?

One of the core values here at The Olive Branch is the Bible is the foundation for all we do. This means a lot of things, but mostly it means that we understand the world, and the workings of the world, through what is revealed to us in the Bible. That's what it means to have a Biblical worldview.

So, when we have questions about life, we can look to the Bible for guidance in interpreting what we experience. So, of course, if we want to answer a question like “why does all this crazy scary stuff happen?”, we start with the Bible and see what it tells us. I came to realize that the authors of the Bible had a way bigger perspective than I did.

Here was my first learning – the writers of the Bible approached our questions with an understanding that there was a whole other reality other than the one we could see and touch and hear. They understood that there was a spiritual dimension or realm to the universe that was every bit as real as the physical realm. Even more, they understood that these 2 dimensions, or realms, were fundamentally connected so what happened in one affected the other, for better or for worse. The writers of the Bible realized that their struggles in life were part of this bigger struggle between the physical and spiritual realms.

Most of you will be very familiar with the story of Creation found in Genesis 1-3. The Bible tells how a holy and loving God created the world and how it was good. It was good because God created it with a most amazing gift – his creation was independent from himself, with the gift of free will. He gave all created beings, spiritual and human, the gift of being able to choose their paths. The creation story tells us how an angel, created to serve God, used his gift of choice to chose to become an enemy of God and he snuck into the Garden of Eden, masquerading as a serpent and tricked Adam and Eve into using their gift of choice to also disobey God. This is the story of the Fall.

We know that as a result of the Fall, Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden and lose their intimacy and physical proximity to God. The broader consequence of the Fall was that while we were created to be citizens in God’s community, we call it his kingdom, the choice by Adam and Eve to obey Satan over God resulted in the citizenship of all humans changing from one in the kingdom of God, to citizenship in world ruled by Satan. This we refer to as the kingdom of Satan, or the kingdom of darkness. You may be thinking, “but that’s not fair. Why should I pay the consequence for choices others made?” That is a difficult question, and it is hard to find an equivalent example. But this is a covenant transaction – like a contract that must be fulfilled. Adam and Eve broke their covenant with God when they disobeyed Him, and the impact affected their descendents. We can all understand that we have to live with the choices that our parents and grandparents made – like parents who chose to live in a communist country and now their children are forced to live under and oppressive regime. With the fall, the state of all of creation changed at that point – the default position we are born into.

A few years ago, I got an iPod for my birthday. So that Christmas, I got an iDock clock radio, so that I could wake up every morning my disco music. The only problem was with the default setting of the iDock. It has this ridiculous feature called “gentlewake”. Which means, I cannot set the volume for the wake up. It starts at volume 1 and is supposed to gradually increase until I wake up and turn it off. The problem was, I swear it was designed by a former race car engineer, because this thing goes from 0 to 60 in 3 seconds. If I do not hit the snooze button in the first 3 seconds, the whole house wakes up! I called them to figure out how to reset it, and they said Sorry – you can’t change the default position. The reality is that short of getting a new one, I am stuck with this ridiculous feature.

And so it is with the status of creation. The fall meant that humans were stuck with the default position of bondage to Satan. There was nothing we could do to change this situation. It doesn't seem fair, and I don't like it, but because of the choices of humankind, we are all born outside of the relationship with God he created us for.

The writers of the Bible understood that creation had fallen, that an illegitimate ruler was on the throne, and was working to destroy what God had created. But they understood that from the moment the fall occurred, God was at work, to regain his rightful place as ruler and restore his creation. They understood there was a battle going on between these 2 rulers and that this battle took place in both the spiritual and physical realms, and that the realms could impact each other for better or for worse. A Biblical worldview has to acknowledge the reality of evil. It has to include an understanding of the source of evil, Satan, who has enslaved God's people and leads a host of fallen angels in his plans to destroy all of God's creation.

The Bible tells us in **1 Peter 5:8** -

Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (TNIV)

Here is the bad news. There is a Devil and he wants to destroy you - you and me; and all for the simple reason that God loves us. And we are no inferior to Satan – he is bigger, smarter, more powerful and invisible to us. He can work in both the spiritual and physical realms. Which is why he can do so much damage to people on this earth. We are no match for him – that is why the world is in such a mess.

That's the bad news. The good news is that Satan is no match for God, and God, from the moment of the fall, has been at work fighting Satan, to protect and provide for his people, and work a plan to save us from this state of bondage to evil. And God works on our behalf in both the spiritual and physical realms. When we work with God, and cooperate with him, God is able to fight FOR us against the powers of evil.

The authors of the Bible books knew this – and, inspired by the Holy Spirit, they recorded this conflict faithfully. The Bible, from start to finish, includes a recounting of God's battle with His enemy to defeat him and to restore creation back to its original default position of freedom and community with Him.

The Old Testament tells of the many ways that God fought on behalf of his people and was victorious against those who wanted their destruction. When God's people cooperated with him, and allowed God to lead them, they prevailed. And when they didn't, they were vulnerable to the destruction that evil brings. It was the presence of God in their lives that made the difference.

Finally, the New Testament tells how the presence of God arrives in human form, and God the Son, Jesus, arrives to take back once and for all what rightfully belongs to him.

1 John 3:8 tells us:

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.” (TNIV)

This might sound strange to some of you. If you ask people why Jesus came, you will get lots of different answers – to die for my sins, to seek and save the lost, to change us to be the people God created us to be. And all these are correct and good and worth celebrating, but it was even bigger than that! He came to defeat the Devil once and for all, so that we could be freed from our sin, so that the lost would be found, and so that we would be changed to be the people God created us to be.

Remember my iDock – the only solution was a new one. And for us, the only solution is the choice for a new life, which Christ provided for us by defeating Satan.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (NIV)

In defeating the Devil, creation could be restored to the original default position God intended – one of wholeness and peace. The Hebrews referred to this as the Shalom of God.

Because he was God, Jesus was the only human who was not born into the default citizenship in the kingdom of Satan. That is one of the reasons why right after his Baptism, Satan lead Jesus into the desert where he tried to tempt him to sin. Since he wasn't born into sin, Satan needed to get him to behave himself into sin. But Jesus, being holy and perfect, didn't break! Jesus was able to withstand all of his temptations, which was a sign Satan was going to be defeated!

Throughout his ministry, Jesus directly confronted evil as he came across it in people's daily lives. When the power of evil made people sick, he healed them. When he met people who were demon-possessed, which is what happens when an evil spirit takes some control over a person's will, Jesus neutralized the power of that spirit, and commanded it to leave. When some died, he raised them from the dead. These miraculous physical and spiritual healings demonstrated to those that witnessed them, that Jesus' power surpassed that of the kingdom of darkness. This power, he shared with his disciples. The books of Acts is filled with examples of this. Over and over again, Jesus and his disciples proved to both humans and spiritual beings, that the power of God was greater than the power of the devil. This was yet another sign to Satan of his coming defeat.

A third and conclusive sign to Satan that his reign was over was the work Jesus did on the cross. This was the ultimate confrontation with evil – because Jesus personally defeated the one causing it. God the Son took on human form and came to earth to live and die to destroy the devil's work and to take his rightful place as King. Jesus death and resurrection was the decisive victory over Satan.

Just before he went to the cross, Jesus clarified the purpose of it.

John 12:31 - Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. (NIV)

Later, the writer of the book of Hebrews would summarize the purpose of Jesus death:

Hebrews 2:14

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (NIV)

The Cross was the decisive victory over Satan. The price of obedience to Satan was death, so Jesus voluntarily went to a cross and paid that price for us. Jesus last words on the cross were, “It is finished.” His work was done. His mission accomplished. We were given the opportunity to choose to become citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus came, freed us, and proved to all of creation, that the power of God surpasses the power of the kingdom of darkness. God has now taken back his rightful rule on earth, and Jesus sits at his right side, with all power and authority given to him.

The obvious question then, is, so why do we struggle with evil if Satan has ultimately been defeated? If the battle has been won, why are we still fighting? It is important to understand that the while Jesus won the decisive victory, and brought the kingdom of God into this world, the Kingdom of God does not yet fully cover all of both the physical and spiritual realms. God established his kingdom in the middle of a fallen world – one that has been under the illegitimate kingship of Satan. While Satan is now defeated, and his power is severely limited, there is still the free will of all of created beings. Satan can still act in the spiritual and physical realms where he has some authority – that is the realm where people make choices to either openly acknowledge Satan, or deny the kingship of God. Remember the default setting? Friends, the hard fact is that making no choice is to choose to remain under the default setting, which is citizenship in the kingdom of darkness.

Which is why God has allowed this post-victory time of trials and suffering? Because He is still waiting for people to choose him, to choose the love and freedom that comes from being a citizen in his kingdom. We don’t know how long he will wait, but the Bible tells us that he wants EVERYONE to come.

So far we have established 2 things:

1. God has an enemy, Satan, who leads an attack against God’s purpose and plans for creation. Satan’s objective is the destruction of God’s creation, with humanity as the ultimate target. This battle between the 2 kingdoms occurs in both the spiritual and physical realms, and they directly impact each other, for better or for worse.
2. Satan is in no way equal to God. God is holy, and is stronger, and more powerful, and has already secured the definitive victory over Satan through Jesus’ death and resurrection. The kingdom of Satan is a defeated kingdom.

That brings us to the third piece of the bigger perspective I wanted to share with you this morning.

The third and final learning is that Jesus has appointed us, his church, to fight the final battles. What is finished is that when confronted by the Kingdom of God, the kingdom of Satan cannot prevail. When Jesus defeated Satan, it was a cosmic forecast of what

happens when the 2 forces go head to head. God's ultimate purpose will always win. Period. Jesus told his disciple Peter:

Matthew 16:18 - I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. (NLT)

What is finished it that there is nothing that Satan and his forces of darkness can do to prevent the expansion of Christ's church in the world, or to stop Christ from coming again in full and final glory. Where the forces of darkness still possess destructive power, which is in their own domain, the church of Jesus Christ has been called and equipped to confront that power and battle against it. That spiritual battle is the part that is not yet finished.

So what does this spiritual battle mean for you and me? It means we are to continue the battle. The church of Jesus Christ is to continue to fight against the powers of darkness, wherever and however they appear. We are to help the people of the world see what the kingdom of God looks like, and to help them want to choose God.

Before I start into how we do this, I need to make an important point of clarification. I suspect that the moment I suggested that the church be engaged in a battle, a number of red flags went up for many of you, and I want to get that out of the way right away! Our images of war have been very informed by CNN, and are very distorted.

When I say that the church is to be engaged in a battle, or war, with the enemies of God, I am NOT advocating any kind of holy war or crusade. Some horrible atrocities have been committed in the name of God, and in the name of Jesus, and that is not what I am referring to. I am not referring to any modern day nation claiming the blessings of God as they justify attacks on other nations. I am not suggesting any attacks on members of other faiths or cultures.

What I am referring to is a spiritual war, which occurs in both the heavenly and earthly realm. It is a battle fought not with weapons like guns and bombs, but with spiritual weapons like love against hate, truth against lies, freedom against slavery, peace against conflict, generosity against greed, acceptance against persecution. Jesus helped define this by telling us it will always look like love – love for God and love for others. It is a conflict between kingdom values – the values of the kingdom of God against the values of the kingdom of darkness. It is a battle where the goal on one side is the restoration of creation the way God intended it (the Shalom of God) and the goal of the other is the complete destruction of that same creation.

If we are going to talk about how we engage in this battle, I thought it was important to settle that first. OK?

Our mission, as followers of Jesus, is to fight against the powers of darkness. Jesus was given power and authority over all of heaven and earth, and he now shares that power and authority with us. Do you want to know how extensive that power and authority is:

Ephesians 1:19-23 That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

When we talk about Christ being at the right hand above all rule and authority, what ruler or authority does that leave out? Nothing we come into contact with! Christ is King. Jesus is Lord! And he is sharing his power with us, for the sake of fighting this battle against the powers that seek to destroy us.

In the Book of Ephesians, the writer, Paul, talks about the armour of God – putting on the armour of God. I love this passage! If there was ever a question in my mind that we are to be engaged in this battle, I only have to reread this section. As we read it, listen to all the battle language!

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, 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. 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. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 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. (NIV)

While there are a month worth of Sundays to talk about in this passage, there are 2 things I want you to notice this morning about this passage. First, want us to notice is the goal of putting on this armour. Did you catch it? It is TO STAND. Paul says it 4 times. Put this on so that...

1. you can take your stand against the devil's schemes
2. you will be able to stand your ground
3. after you have done everything, to stand
4. Stand firm then

What does Paul mean when he calls us to STAND? What does STAND look like? There are lots of kinds of STAND. For example, I take Tae Kwon Do with my family, and there

are 4 different kinds of STAND in Tae Kwon Do. There is the listening stand (hands behind back, legs apart) that says, "I am listening". But that's not what Paul was talking about. There is the Attention Stand (arms straight down, feet together) that says "I am waiting for instruction". But Christ has already given us his instruction, so that isn't the right STAND either. There is the Jumbe Stand (arms out in front, fists clenched feet apart) which says, "I will fight, should I be attacked". But of course, we HAVE been attacked, so the time for Jumbe is over. And last there is the fighting Stand which says "I am now in a fight". With this last one, I think we are now getting close to what Paul meant, but we are not there yet. There is one more kind of Stand.

To remain standing is a military metaphor for victory in battle! We are to be standing victorious - fist raised in the air, in victory! The goal is to stand victorious! And we can, when we fight in the power and authority of Jesus. Can you imagine us together, standing victorious? That is a good image! I want to ask you, is that goal of your life - to STAND? To be able to finish victorious against the schemes of evil and darkness?

The other important thing to notice is what is foundational to the armour of God. It was so important that Paul said it 3 times. PRAYER. In battling the evil one, in engaging in a spiritual battle against the kingdom of darkness, nothing is as important as prayer. Nothing. Prayer for all kinds of requests and petitions; prayer for each other and prayer for the church, our own Olive Branch, and for the church around the world.

If you would like to be prayed for today, you can visit the Prayer Corner where some wonderful people are prepared to do battle on your behalf!

Hopefully, by this point, you can see why we need to engage in this battle. The reality of this battle is not in question. The only question now is "will we STAND?" Will you and I trust God enough to use the weapons he has given us, to protect ourselves and our families and fight on behalf of others who do not yet know of the spiritual war that wages on around them? Maybe you can think of someone who has battled on your behalf. Someone who spent time on their knees praying for you, or telling you how much God loves you. I know I had a very special couple who did battle for me. They did battle for my husband first, and then for me, and they taught me how to do battle for others.

We are joining in the battle that had been going on for thousands of years and has been fought by all the Saints before us! And we must remember: the enemy we face is not equal to the King we serve. The Bible says,

1 John 4:4 "the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world..." (NLT)

We are serving a King who has secured the victory and provided us the weapons we need to prevail in these final battles. So what do we do? We follow Jesus in declaring the forces of darkness defeated!

1. We announce the good news of Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that he sent his only son.....Jesus came to destroy the devil, and by resisting the Devil's schemes and dying on a cross in our place, he has defeated him. We are now

free to choose Jesus as Lord and to live as free men and women in God's kingdom. Creation is being restored!

- a. We announce this here at The Olive Branch on Sunday mornings together.
 - b. We announce this to people God puts in our path from Monday to Saturday – people who we have built relationships with, and people who ask us to explain why we are the way we are.
 - c. We announce this by protecting our freedom carefully – not allowing ourselves to become re-enslaved by the circumstances of our life. Not by debt, not by unforgiveness, not by addictions, not by financial or power ambitions, or anything else that traps us.
 - d. We announce this without apology. This is probably the hardest one for us Canadians. Because it is not politically correct to say that Jesus is the only way. That he alone is the truth and the light. But we have to say that – because if our default position is slavery to Satan, the only one who can save us is one who has defeated Satan. And only Jesus defeated Satan. That truth doesn't make Christianity exclusive or narrowminded – because he defeated Satan for everyone! In fact, Christianity is the most inclusive faith there is because the invitation is to everyone!
2. A second way we announce the kingdom of darkness defeated is we use the power and authority Christ gave us to battle back the kingdom of darkness. There is nothing more powerful than the power of love, and we need to use love as our weapon in this war.
- a. We use prayer to ask for protection and provision, and to ask for healing and deliverance. This is exactly what Christ and his disciples did, and the kingdom of God expanded so fast that it ultimately tore apart the Roman empire, PEACEFULLY.
 - b. We use the authority of Christ to bind, or neutralize, enemy attacks. Jesus did it, and has given us the authority to do it to.
3. The third way we announce the kingdom of darkness defeated is we demonstrate what life in the kingdom looks like, by loving outrageously and sacrificially.
- a. We demonstrate that God provides for the needy and the hungry by providing for those who are.
 - b. We demonstrate that God's kingdom is just by speaking up for those who are being unfairly judged and treated.
 - c. We demonstrate the value of all humanity by treating everyone as equals, and by treating everyone with dignity and respect and love.
 - d. We demonstrate grace by extending forgiveness.
 - e. We demonstrate peace by being peace-makers, working to resolve our own differences, and helping others to resolve theirs.
- Do you realize that when we do these things, we battle back the kingdom of darkness? These are acts of war!
 - When I told you 2 minutes ago that Christ defeated Satan and has set us free from slavery to Satan, that was an act of war.
 - When we tell a friend what God has done for us, through Jesus Christ, it is an act of war.

- When we say NO to past addictions, to morally offensive behaviour and selfish choices, these are acts of war.
- When we head down to Scott Mission and feed and minister to homeless people, this is an act of war.
- When we pray with our children at night, and for them during the day, these are acts of war.
- When we pray for each other after the service, or during the week through the prayer chain, this is an act of war.
- When we teach children the Word of God and show them God's love and grace, this is an act of war.
- When we choose to forgive others, we break the enemy's grip on us, and this is an act of war.
- When we welcome people into our church or into our homes, and treat them as the treasured friends they are, this is an act of war!
- When we care for people who are sick, and visit people who are lonely, these are acts of war!
- When we lead a Roots group, and disciple others, this is an act of war.
- When we give up our time, our money, our well-being for the sake of another, these are acts of war.
- When we humbled ourselves and get baptized, as lots of people are going to do on Sept 7, that is an act of war!
- All that we do in honor of and in obedience to Jesus, is an act of spiritual war!

I know that probably everyone does some of this now and you didn't maybe realize the full implication of what you were doing. At least that was true for me. I can only tell you that I feel very empowered, knowing that as I engage in these activities, I am participating in the most critical battles of all – the final battles against the kingdom of darkness. Quite frankly, when I participate, I am motivated by the fact that I am doing damage to the kingdom of darkness. After all the damage that this kingdom has done to me, to my family and to the people I love, it is personal, and it is great to know that God wants to use me to dish it back and more! It inspires me to engage at a higher level, and I hope it will inspire you too.

When listen to 680 News now, I am reminded that there is a battle between the 2 kingdoms; that this battle impacts the physical world significantly and painfully. I am reminded that God IS in the middle of it all, fighting on our behalf and for our deliverance. And I am reminded of Jesus' command to us to engage in this battle, in both a spiritual and physical way, to impact our world for the better.

Let's pray.

God, thank you for the revelation in your Bible. Thank you for helping us to understand the scope of this battle, and the importance of our role in it. For some, God, this is the first time for understanding it this way, and I ask that you would help us to always remember that the enemy we battle has already been defeated by you. For others who have been fighting this battle for awhile, we ask you to help us continue on with renewed sense of purpose and energy. We thank you for the

weapons you have given us, and we ask that you help us to use them well, that we will STAND in the end. In Jesus name, Amen.

Ephesians 3:10 tell us that the church engages in Spiritual battle when we declare the arrival of the kingdom of God for the powers and principalities of darkness to hear. So I want to invite you now to STAND for one last worship song together, one that declares that God reigns and that His enemies are defeated! You may need to just listen to the words, and hear again who God is, and be reassured of his victory. Or you may need to belt out the words, and feel empowered again to fight this battle. Do what you need to do.

Final Blessing

And all the powers of darkness tremble at what they've just heard.
Cause all the powers of darkness can't drown out a single word.

Friends, this week, may you remember that God reigns. And may you not just remember it, but may you live out your belief in it and may you accept the job we have been given to fight in these final battles.

This week, may God reign in your heart, and in your homes and at your work and while you play. This week, may you be a mighty warrior for the Kingdom of God, standing up to the kingdom of darkness in the authority of Jesus Christ.

In the words of Paul the apostle to the Ephesian church,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

God bless you and I hope to see you next Sunday.