Unseen Realm

Our Role in the Unseen Realm

"*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand 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 over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*

Eph. 6:11-12

Introduction

Where We've Been: Last week we looked at Jesus and His interactions with divine forces throughout His ministry, specifically the wilderness temptations and the transfiguration.

Questions:

Q: How do the New Testament writers discuss the supernatural? What is our role in this battle?

Where We're Going: Today, we're going to discuss how we participate in the spiritual battle and what that participation brings about personally and collectively.

Baptism in Spiritual Warfare

1 Peter 3:14-22 is a rather peculiar passage. It starts out rather easy to understand, but then quickly devolves into a "what is going on here?" kind of passage. It can be tempting to gloss over with a shrug and move on, but something important is being said. Here are verses 3:18-22:

"18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, 19 in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, 20 because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. 21 Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him."

We know from 2 Peter, and the similar discussion had in Jude, that, at the very least, Peter and Jude were good students of texts like 1 Enoch. While these books were not inspired, they seemed to hold some truth that Peter and Jude drew on and included within the inspired text of Scripture (specifically about the fallen angels of Genesis 6). Peter seems to be doing more of that here in this first letter about the spirits in prison.

In 2 Peter 2:4, we are told that the sinful angels were cast into Tartarus (NOTE: "hell" isn't a good translation here. "Hades" is better than "Hell", but this is still a different word

altogether). Peter is speaking generally about the place of the dead (equivalent to OT "Sheol").

In the book of 1 Enoch, the sinful angels (called "watchers") asked Enoch to appeal their sentence to God. God denied their release and Enoch was sent to give the bad news.

Peter seems to be using this story as a backdrop for the actions of Jesus (similarly to how Paul uses Adam as a backdrop for Jesus in 1 Cor. 15:45).

Through the cross, the evil spiritual forces believed they had won the victory over Jesus. Peter appears to tell us that these forces were set straight by Jesus in the place of the dead. They hadn't won the victory, their defeat had been set. NOTE: at the end of this section the dead Jesus is resurrected and set at God's right hand with the "powers" and "authorities" subjected to Him (think back to Paul's Ephesians language).

Consider also Luke 11:14-26. When one unclean spirit leaves, if nothing is there to replace it, they will return with more. It seems very reasonable then to view this passage in light of places like Acts 2:38 and following and even Jesus' own baptism (Matthew 3:13-17), where the Holy Spirit is highlighted. The spirits of sin are sent out, and there becomes expectation for those in Christ Jesus to grow in their walk with God through the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26). It is also worth noting that Jesus' ministry begins with His baptism, and then preaching to those that have been baptized by John. The way to something better is prepared by the washing of water.

How does baptism fit into all of this? It joins us to that resurrection of Jesus (see also Romans 6). It removes the sin and its effects and brings us into harmony with Jesus. Through baptism we are delivered from death in the same way that Noah was delivered from unrighteousness in his day.

The Bible in Spiritual Warfare

At the end of the book of Ephesians, Paul launches into a large scale discussion of "the heavenlies" (6:10-20), a topic he only somewhat alluded to in prior chapters (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10). Paul tells us that the "heavenlies" are where:

Our spiritual blessings are located (1:3)

Christ is seated (1:20)

We are also seated (2:6)

"Rulers and authorities" are (3:10) – specifically being made aware of the wisdom of God through the church.

Finally, that this is where "rulers", "authorities", "cosmic powers", and "spiritual forces" are and that our wrestling is with them (6:12)
NOTE: these things are specifically noted as NOT being "flesh and blood".

The "heavenlies" then is a place where both good and evil are striving against each other. God is there (Father, Spirit, Son), as are we, but so are these "spiritual forces of evil".

Paul doesn't just tell us we are locked in a battle however, he tells us that what the tools of that battle are:

> Belt of truth (6:14)
>
> Breastplate of righteousness (6:14)
>
> Shoes of the Gospel of Peace (6:15)
>
> Shield of faith (6:16)
>
> Helmet of Salvation (6:17)
>
> Sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (6:17)
>
> NOTE: "prayer" ends the seems to tie everything up here. It keeps us alert (6:18) and tied to Spirit (6:18) as well as each other ("saints"; 6:18). It also focuses us on our true wrestling against these spiritual forces through gospel proclamation (6:19-20).

Some have posited that Paul uses this example of armor due to his being chained to roman guards. While this is certainly possible, there seems to be more going on here. Paul, being a tremendous Old Testament student, is likely making a connection to Isaiah and the Psalms.

> Isaiah 59:14-20 – this section specifically lists the "breastplate" of righteousness and "helmet" of salvation.
>
> Isaiah 52:7 talks about the "good news" (the phrase translated as "gospel" in the New Testament) that brings "peace" and connects it to our "feet".
>
> Isaiah 11:1-5 – mentions a "belt" though this is connected to righteousness and faith instead of "truth" specifically (NOTE: "righteousness" can mean what is "right" and "accurate"). "Spirit" is mentioned here repeatedly as well in connection with "wisdom", "understanding", and "knowledge".

These Isaiah passages are directly linked to God/Jesus. The most interesting part about all of this is the phrase of Paul "the armor **of God**". Isaiah shows us that this isn't just armor produced by God, but the armor that God **wears**. How do we fight the battles against the spiritual forces of evil? The same way that God does, by being about truth, righteousness, peace, salvation, and His word. In short, bear His image.

Isaiah does not list one part of the armor that Paul mentions here: the shield of faith. That being said, the shield is present in another part of the Old Testament, Psalm 91:4:

> *"He will cover you with his pinions,*
> *and under his wings you will find refuge;*
> *his faithfulness is a shield and buckler."*

Later in this Psalm (91:11-12) the Psalmist will write:

"For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."

It is this section of Scripture that Satan quotes to Jesus in the second temptation of Matthews gospel (Mt. 4:5-7). Jesus responds with Deuteronomy (as he does in all the other temptations), but by doing so deflects the "flaming darts of the evil one". In other words, Jesus shows us how to engage in spiritual warfare by using the armor of God.

Practically speaking, this has tremendous implication for the way we live our lives. Things like Bible study, worship, and patterning our lives around the teachings of Scripture are much more than just living good lives so we can get to heaven. They are tools through which the world, seen and unseen, is changed. Every action of spiritual living brings the battle closer to an end. In the next section, we'll see how baptism fits into this warfare.

Summary

Though unseen, we are participants in something much bigger than living a good life and trying to get to heaven. We are a part of the advancing of God's kingdom throughout His creation to reclaim the lost parts, under the dominion of evil, to His righteous ways. Every time we uphold the truth of the gospel, bring righteousness, spread peace, and confess Jesus' name we are both advancing God's kingdom and taking another step towards the ultimate defeat of sin and its corruption on this creation. Through keeping in step with the Spirit through study, prayer, personal behavior, and our behavior towards others, we are continuing the march of God's kingdom in the world and bringing about the hope of Psalm 82: "*Arise, O God, judge the earth; for you shall inherit all the nations!*".