

# The No-Win Scenario

Message #1 in the series "Finding Victory in a No-Win World"

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
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*Gracious, Heavenly Father, we give You thanks for the power of Your word and we pray boldly that You would open us up to Your word and open Your word up to us. Teach us, Lord, what You would have us learn as You conform our lives into the disciples that You have called us to be. Lord, we're going to be talking about spiritual warfare. And Lord, I pray that You would help us to engage Your message from a place of freedom, from a place of victory rather than a place of fear. So govern this place, Lord, govern each and every one of us and help us to engage this message of hope from the perspective of what You have done on the cross of Jesus Christ. All of this Lord, we pray in Jesus name and all God's people said Amen.*



So, her name - I'm going to call her Jane - I met Jane a little over 20 years ago when she was brought into my office at another church. Jane was brought to my office from a place where she had been struggling so badly that she was wanting to kill herself. She was dragged to my office, literally by two friends, two neighbors who had her linked arm in arm and brought her literally dragging her to my office. They wanted her to get help, but they didn't know what to do. And as I listened,

I listened to the beginning of a story that would forever change my life and my perspective on spiritual things, spiritual warfare in particular.

That particular day, and then for the next numbers of weeks that she came back for counseling, really, I don't do professional counseling, but she would go nowhere else, she absolutely refused, but she would come back to me. And so, we began to unfold, unpack a lifetime of pain. And her story was severe, and I can't go into all of those details with you. Over the years, I've had permission from her to share some of the dimensions of her story. As a young child, a very young child, her father was involved with the occult, very specifically he was a major leader in a witch's coven. It was a local coven, and they would meet on a regular basis and every time he would meet with these other guys in this coven, he brought his daughter. And as part of their rituals, he would pass her around and the men would have their way with her. It was an awful, very descriptive, painful story that came pouring out of her life. And over the course of the next several weeks as she unpacked this horrible, horrible story of her life. She began to be open to prayer. And I remember very clearly one day we were finishing up a session and she allowed me to pray for her. And so I finished praying, said Amen and looked up and looked into a face of a young person who had been stricken by terror. And so, I said, "Jane, what's going on?" And she said, "Don't you see them? Don't, don't you see them?" And she was looking into the corner of my office and saw my gaze looked over to where she was looking, and I didn't see anything. And I said, "So tell me, what are you seeing? What is it that you're seeing?" And she said, "they're

dark, shadowy, cloaked figures. You don't see them?" And there was terror in her eyes. I didn't know what to do, so I did exactly what I did know, I went back to prayer and I immediately just in prayer, very directly I took authority. That's what scripture taught me. I took authority in that room, and I took authority in Jesus Christ and cast out anything that was evil, cast out anything that was demonic, and I prayed my heart out, and as I finished and I said, Amen. I opened just one eye and I looked towards her. And I said, "are they gone?" And she said, "yes." And her face was completely changed.

Over the next several weeks, I saw the evidence of how those demonic forces were gone. The week after that encounter, she came into my office, and she smiled for the very first time. There was a lightness to her step. There was a joy to her face that I had not ever seen before and gradually, over the course of the next several weeks and months, she did some very strategic things. She quit her job, which was very oppressive to her. She went back to school, got additional training, got another job, started coming to church, very regularly, started engaging her faith on a very consistent basis, started going into scriptures herself and her story, her terror, her pain suddenly transformed into an amazing testimony that she has shared several times publicly. The power of spiritual war.

Now I can confess to you that I am not an expert on spiritual warfare, but I have been face to face with the enemy multiple times. I have been face to face in dramatic ways that to this day, draw me to my knees. And I know that there is a war going on. And like most spiritual wars, we don't always see them. That's what makes it difficult, we don't necessarily see an enemy. We don't see the devil at work. So, it's hard for us in our modern way of thinking to wrap our minds around something like a spiritual battle that we cannot tangibly see, but I'm here to tell you that we may not be able to see it, but we can see the evidence of it. There is tangible proof that we are engaging in a war, a spiritual war.

Just like, you know, a virus. You know, I think we're a little familiar with viruses over the past couple of years unless we're science minded and we're looking through a microscope, we don't see viruses, but we certainly have seen the evidence of viruses. There is a battle that's going on. But here's the thing, as we begin 2022, you need to know a couple of things about this battle.

The first thing that you need to know is that the battle that is ongoing is a battle that has a goal, and that goal is not just to undermine what God is birthing in each and every one of our lives and in our corporate life together, the goal is also to convince each and every one of us who are followers of Jesus Christ that we are irrelevant. And to be honest like you, perhaps, and like many others who are in the Church of Jesus Christ over the last several decades, at least if not longer, the enemy has convinced the church that there's no war going on. And it has lulled the church into a slumber. But I see the evidence. In 2022, as we begin this new year, I see the evidence in a divided church, not so much here at St. Paul's, but a church universal. I see division polarizing us. I see that polarizing happening in our society. I see good people getting stupid in their behavior. I see Christ followers suddenly forgetting who they are and choosing to live in patterns that are not consistent with what they had been taught and what they had learned. I see the evidence. Do you?

And here's the second principle and truth that we need to know about this war. For followers of Jesus, the end of the war has already occurred. We are not fighting a battle trying to earn victory. The victory has already been established. How do we know that? The Cross of Jesus Christ was the moment in history where all that battle was won. So, we do not approach this battle, this war from a place of being victims, we approach this battle from a place of victory. And the Church of Jesus Christ, especially for this season that we're in right now, in our culture and in our world, we need to remember who we are and whose we are because the battle is going to continue raging until that point in history when Jesus comes back to claim us. That will happen. I believe it with all my heart. But until then, the enemy wants to convince us that we're not victors.

And so, over the course of the next several weeks, I think it's six or seven weeks, we're going to dive into a passage of scripture, a passage that the Apostle Paul writes very clearly in his letter to the Ephesians Chapter 6, starting in verse 10 through 20. And we're going to dive into this passage and we're going to look at what the Apostle Paul actually teaches that are our weapons that will enable us not only to stand in the midst of the chaos of that battle, but to engage it without fear and to remember that we are a people who fight from victory. And so, I invite you to be a part of that journey. And today, what I want to do is I want to dive into the first couple of verses of this passage and give you just a little bit of a framework for understanding the rest of this series. This is a series called "Finding Victory in a No-Win World."

So, from the vantage point, you know, we don't like talking about Satan. We don't like talking about the devil. And yet at the same time, ironically, we are driven to watch horror movies on TV that depict Satan and evil having its way against good. I mean, we do it all the time. We watch those shows. We watch those movies and we're drawn to it. But when we talk about it in the church, you know, we're quick to go, "ehhhh, Satan..". You know, we think of the church lady on Saturday Night Live for those of you who are old enough to remember that. So, we categorize all that religious talk as irrelevant. And therein lies the biggest challenge. For me, I trust Jesus and I trust those early disciples because they were on the front lines. I also trust a lot of my missionary friends who are at other parts of the world. They are engaging in spiritual warfare like we have never, ever experienced before in our culture of America. And when they tell me stories of what they're facing on a daily basis as they engage being a faithful follower of Jesus in that hard, harsh world, I'm humbled. I'm humbled. We don't know what persecution looks like. We don't know what real spiritual warfare looks like. We think we're under spiritual attack because Chick-Fil-A closes on Sundays. Right? That's our entitlement in our culture, but those early disciples and Jesus himself, they knew better. Facing into a crowd of Pharisees and religious leaders that were clearly antagonistic to the freedom that Jesus preached. In John 8, he said,

**"You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." [John 8:44 NIV].**

Notice the language that Jesus is using to describe the enemy, Satan. Interesting language that Jesus is using in just two chapters later and in Chapter 10 of John's gospel, in talking with His disciples, Jesus says,

**"The thief (referring to the enemy Satan) comes only to steal and kill and destroy;" [John 10:10 NIV].**

But I want you to hear something. We who are followers of Jesus need to get this. There is an unwritten word that follows this passage, and the unwritten word is the word, BUT and that but is big. It's a big but. And the but is this, Jesus says,

**"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." [John 10:10 NIV].**

The same guy, the same John, same Apostle who wrote these words, wrote a letter 1 John to the churches and in 1 John Chapter 3, he writes the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. There was an intentionality to what Jesus had in mind, to destroy the devil's work. When you look at the Apostle Paul and writing Colossians Chapter 2:15, this is what Paul says,

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. [Colossians 2:15 NIV].

What the enemy thought was the elimination of Jesus, God turned around and used mightily and powerfully to win the war. The Cross of Jesus Christ, there is victory. We do not fight this battle from a place of being victims or even pawns. We are soldiers in a war that's already been won. It's already been won. And so we take the next step, we who are followers of Jesus, we as we begin this year 2022 and many of us are flooding the gymnasiums with gym memberships, at least for the next six to eight weeks until all of that wears off, and we're exercising ourselves in order to get rid of all of the guilt, I mean, the food that I mean or whatever that that good goal may have been. We need as the church to start exercising those muscles of our spiritual life. Paul makes it very clear, because the muscles of our spiritual life for the Church of Jesus Christ have atrophied. And we are weak when we were meant to be strong. So, we've got to reengage those muscles.

That's what this series is all about. It's waking up the church, a church that has been in slumber. A church that has been convinced that there is no battle going on. So, we are irrelevant. Paul has a different take on that. So, look with me for just a couple of verses for today Ephesians Chapter 6, starting at verse 10. Paul says,

**Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the whole armor 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. [Ephesians 6:10-12 NIV].**

Powerful words. These are really powerful words. And if we're not reading them from a mindset of followers of Jesus who stand in victory, they can be pretty scary words. And Paul knew that scare. Paul knew that fear. He was writing these words, most likely from a prison. So, Ephesus in the day was a metropolitan community, probably third in line, from Rome being the top place, Ephesus was probably the third largest metropolitan community back in the day. So, there was a lot of influence and really huge in influence. In Ephesus was this major temple for the Goddess Artemis. Artemis was a huge moneymaker for that community. I mean, if you can imagine they had marketers selling idols to Artemis, and there was a lot of money in that, and they would worship Artemis in very unique ways. We don't have time to get into all of that today, but huge, huge, horrific ways of doing worship and Artemis was the thing.

And so Paul begins to set up a new church in that community and lives begin to be changed and people were giving their hearts to Jesus Christ. They were seeing transformation, and it was threatening both the theology of their worship of Artemis, but also the marketers who were making a buck. Suddenly, people weren't buying them because they were finding new life and freedom in Jesus Christ. And so, it caused an uproar, a riot and Paul got thrown into prison. So, you know, sometimes when I think of Paul writing these letters and that we have in our New Testament, I have this picture of Paul sitting at a desk in a long white beard and probably balding kind of like me. And, you know, just got scroll in hand and pen, and he's writing it out and communicating as best he can, these words of wisdom and advice to those growing Christians and churches. Paul was severely beaten. Probably bruised like none of us could ever imagine. Had been whipped numerous times, starved, was in chains in a dank prison cell and by whatever light he could find in whatever form it could take place, he communicated words of hope.

And in that context of Ephesus, a bastion of the occult, of the mystery religions of horrible forms of torture and slavery. Paul wrote these words, be strong. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Let me take you a little deeper into that. You know, I'm a lover of words and the lover of God's Word. Look with me here. That word be strong is a very unique word in the original language that he used the Greek. And what we know about that word is that it's in the passive mood. It's a middle passive mood. And what that means is the actor of that strength is not us. What Paul is literally saying is be strengthened. He's not asking us to somehow, you know, gird yourself up and beef yourself up. He's saying be beefed up by the Lord. God is the active agent. Our strength comes to us from Almighty God. The second thing about this verb is it's in the present tense, which means that the empowering from God is continual. It's an active verb. That means that what Paul is saying is every single one of us who put our trust in Jesus Christ, every moment of every day, we have a source of strength that's coming into us. The strengthening is coming into us constantly. It's available. Also, this verb is in the plural, which means it's not just for us individually, it's meant for the church. It's meant for all of us, whether in person or online. When we gather together, we are stronger by our unity, by our togetherness. That unity is one of the weapons that God uses for us to stand against the enemy. The plural nature of this word is so critical for us.

I don't know about you, but I've heard people over the years say to me, "but Pastor David, I'm spiritual, but I don't need the church. I can connect with God on my own. I don't need the church." Folks, it is true. You can connect with God on your own. We need to connect with God

on our own. But it is a lie to believe that we can do this journey without each other. It is a lie and it is a lie that is costly. It's plural for a purpose. Our strength is found in numbers. And also, this verb is in the imperative, which means it's a command. Paul is saying to the believers. Be strengthened. Be strengthened, we're hearing a command, we're hearing an order from a general saying to each and every one of us soldiers, "Hey, remember who you are." Why is that important? Next phrase be strong in the Lord, put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. That word put on it is also a unique verb. You know what? Guess what? It's in the passive as well, which means that we are actually clothed by God. We're clothed by God, and what does he clothe us with? He clothes us with our new identity in Christ. Put on, allow God to put on to you a new identity, Paul says in 2 Corinthians, that when you say yes to Jesus a new creation takes place. We fight with an armor that is rooted in our identity in Christ. And when we put on Christ, we have all that we need. Also, it's in the plural, so it's for the whole church. We got to get dressed together. We got to remember who we are. We got to put on Christ. Also notice that it's in the imperative, which means it's a command. We cannot do this on our own. We cannot face the enemy on our own, no matter how strong we may feel in any given moment. Guess what? Satan's stronger. He's stronger and he's wiser than you or me.

No matter how long you been doing this, he's got time on his hands. He's got, years, decades, millennia on you. And there ain't no surprise that you can't pull out of your pocket, "oh, I betcha he hasn't faced this before." He's gotcha. You can't do it on your own. But you don't have to. You don't have to. Notice that it's the whole armor of God. In Greek, the Greek word is, the word that we take our English word panoply from a panoply is a complete set of armor. So, you know, when I go, when I go shopping for clothes, which is very rare. No comments, please. Yeah, it's very rare. I hate going to the mall. I hate going shopping for clothes. And one of the reasons why I hate going shopping for clothes is number one, my height, I can't get something right off the rack. I just can't. The reality is there's a new way of dressing for guys and the other guys on staff, they do this all the time, their shirts are not tucked in, it's the untucked look. Right? I tried that once my shirt tails came down to my knees. I have a different way of dressing because of my height. I just can't do that. So, when I go shopping for clothes, sometimes I'll piecemeal it. You know that that doesn't fly when it comes to the spiritual battle. We can't just say, "Oh, I'm going to take this piece of armor. That's all I need today, and I don't need these other pieces of armor today because, you know, I'm not facing this or that. So, I'm just going to use this. I'm going to go out with just a helmet on, so it doesn't work."

So, Paul says, you've got to do the panoply, you got to do the whole. Face into this battle fully dressed, and there's good news that panoply is of God. It's of God. That means, and we'll explore this in the coming weeks, that means that all the pieces of the armor, metaphorically speaking, are what God wears. So what God is doing is He's giving to each of us what He himself has on. It's the armor of God. I don't know about you, but I've read this passage numerous times, I've preached on this passage numerous times over the years. Preparing for this message, this is the first time I paused at that phrase. That was for the longest time I just had put on the whole armor of God, but I approached it from the standpoint of what I had to do. Now this is what God has done. This is what God is giving. This is the armor of God. Do you know what can penetrate the armor of God? Nothing. And that's what we are asked to put on.

Also, that armor, by definition, is Christ. That armor is our identity in Jesus. So when we go out in the morning and you make up your face and you do your hair and you put your clothes on and you go red, you got your coffee and you're ready to go meet the world before you exit, have you put on your armor? Have you put on your identity in Christ? Because I've got to be honest with you, I know way too many Christians who leave their homes forgetting who they are. We forget and when we do, we are going out there exposed, going into battle without having the right equipment. But there's more, Paul says, "put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." I love that word wiles. You know, it's just one of those words we don't use anymore. I think a Wile E. Coyote, right? That's when I see that word. That's who I think I know. I'm dating myself. But that's what I think. Wiles. It's a unique word in the original language of Greek. It's the word *methodeia*. I know it sounds so like Methodist. It's just like a *methodeia* is translated as schemes. Thankfully, Methodist doesn't translate as schemes as its methods. Method is what our route is. But *methodeia* schemes made me wonder what are some of the schemes of the devil? We're not going to spend a ton of time here. As I said, we're going to unpack this over the next several weeks, but just thinking out loud, what are some of the strategies that we can anticipate in the battlefield?

First, Satan tends to attack us in the areas of our weakness. Just about every one of us, I'm sure if I were to say, what are your weaknesses, you could probably rattle them all off, right? Because we do that pretty much every morning when we wake up and look in the mirror, we see our rawness, we see the rawness of who we are. We know what our weaknesses are. And so does Satan and he goes after those weaknesses because he wants to make you feel irrelevant. And if he can dismantle you, he can dismantle your strength, he's going to go after it. He will also ironically go after your strength. Why? Because the strength in us, that's where our pride is. And Satan goes after our source of pride. You have something that's a strength of yours. That's the place where you're more inclined to go "Ohp. I got this. I got this. I don't need God. I'm good. Don't need the church. I'm good. I've got this. Right?" That's where he goes after, and he'll go after it in unique ways. He may increase the applause for your strength because by doing so it's the set up for dismantling you and making you irrelevant. Because if it's all about you, you begin to displace God.

The battle, you know, there are other writers who have written that we fight a battle for our minds, that Satan is going after our minds, I don't really believe that that's the battle. I believe that the battle is for our loyalty. It's a battle for our hearts. Our minds are one of the arenas that Satan uses, but he's going after our hearts, our loyalty. And as such, he's going to attack what and who is important to us in order to divide and isolate us. It's going to get us to a place where when we push everything out away from us, we're going to feel isolated. We're going to get angry. Some of the anger that we're feeling, some of the depression that we're feeling, some of the anxiety that we're feeling culturally is meant to push away everybody that's important to us in order for us to be isolated, because we're more vulnerable when we're standing alone. And that's why the church is essential. We can't simply say I'm spiritual, but I don't need the church. We need each other. There's a war going on, and we don't fight battles alone.

And, Satan uses the skill of distraction to pull us away. You get up in the morning, you make a decision, I'm going to get up at five o'clock in the morning, I'm going to do my devotions and five o'clock comes around and you go, I'm up, I'm ready. You know what? I must get that

crocker going because it's important for that. So, I'm going to go do that. Oh, I'm doing the crocker. So, I got to do this and suddenly I'm into my day and I've forgotten what my devotion time was supposed to be. Anything that divides and conquers, isolates, or distracts, take note, it's a scheme. And all of this is important because we live in a world right now that's filled with No-Win scenarios and the No-Win scenarios convince us that maybe this isn't relevant and maybe all of this it's not important. No win scenarios pit us against competing values that no matter what choice we make, we hurt somebody. But here's the thing, and we'll go into detail as we go through the series, here's the thing about No-Win scenarios, when you have a No-Win scenario, you need to realize that for followers of Jesus, it's a test of character and faith. No-Win scenarios are very hard, but they are going after each and every one of our characters to develop a strength in choosing our loyalties for Jesus.

Also, something very important to keep in mind, if you face a no-win scenario as a follower of Jesus, it just may be a sign that God is about to birth, something new in your life or in the church's life together. And because God is birthing something and you're at a no-win scenario, it could be that you are therefore becoming a threat to the enemy. If you are not a threat, Satan just doesn't bother you. But spiritual warfare increases and intensifies when you draw closer to Jesus. So, when you draw closer to Jesus you need to put on the armor of our new identity. Because in Christ, we're already victors. He's already won. So, starting place, you got to get right with Jesus. Because He's the armor. He's the armor. Let's pray.

*Father, God, we thank You for the armor that You have placed on us. But it is by your grace that we live in that armor. It is by your strength that we face the battles. And it is by your armor and by the cross that we live as victors in this no-win world. Keep us focused on that, Lord, as we put our trust in Jesus. Amen.*

