

# Going to War

by Richard E. Bieber

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*To follow Jesus is to be engaged in war against evil, Satan, and the kingdom of evil, and we conquer evil by being strong in the Lord, wearing the whole armor of God, directing our fire at the source, and opposing evil with good.*

**Topics:** "Spiritual Warfare", "Christian Armor"

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## Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the spiritual warfare Christians face, emphasizing the misconception many have about the world being a peaceful place and Jesus as a passive figure. He highlights the reality of evil's presence, the battle against deception and lies, and the need to understand the true nature of Jesus as a warrior against darkness. Believers are called to be strong in the Lord, clothe themselves in the armor of God, address the root causes of evil, and combat evil with good, following the examples of Jesus and early Christians.

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## Transcript

Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

I Corinthians 15:24-26

Most of us feel somewhat uncomfortable picturing ourselves as "Christian soldiers" marching as to war. It just doesn't seem to fit what we're really experiencing. It didn't cost us very much to get into our fellowship. Nobody's going to put us in jail for being in it. When the service is over we'll have a little something to eat and have a nice afternoon. So where's the war?

The reason we have difficulty perceiving the war is because most of us have grown up with two serious misconceptions.

First, the misconception about the world in which we live.

Second, a misconception about who Jesus is.

First, we have a misconception about this world in which we live. We still think of it, for all the injustice and evil and ugliness and absurdity, as a rose garden. If you mind your own business and stay out of trouble,

you get along. And if you use your brains, you might even succeed.

But even if you succeed so well that you have your own rose garden surrounded by an iron fence and every kind of electronic surveillance, inside your wonderful rose garden there will be a serpent.

In the Garden of Eden there was a serpent who managed to conquer Adam and Eve. And every time Jesus describes the world in which we live he does so by pointing to the existence of an enemy.

Another parable he put before them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat..."

Matthew 13:24-25

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

John 10:10-12

And so there's a serpent in the garden ... there's an enemy who sows weeds among the wheat ... there's a thief that comes to steal and to kill and destroy ... there's a wolf that snatches and scatters the sheep. When we're talking about evil, we're not talking merely about the absence of good, like cold is the absence of heat. When we're talking about evil, as Jesus talks about evil, we're talking about radical evil ... evil that has roots and life of its own. We're talking about evil which is intelligent, personal, well organized. And the means by which this Evil manages to get possession of the minds of men and women is primarily by means of the lie, deceit.

"Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" ... God didn't say that.

And Eve said,

"Well, no, he didn't say that. We can eat of any of the trees except for this one."

"Oh. Well why can't you eat of that one?"

"God said that if we eat of that we'll surely die."

"No way! The only reason God won't let you eat of that tree is because if you do you'll become as smart as he is."

And so the story goes all through history. All we have to do is look back on our own past right up to the last five minutes and we can see the scars in our own lives ... how many times we succumb to the temptation to either be drawn in by false hope, something that feeds our vanity, or paranoid fear, running from something that really doesn't exist or chasing after something that doesn't exist. You can walk down the street where you live and you can see the evidence. There is an enemy. And the bottom line is that eventually each of us either conquers that enemy or gets conquered.

The second misconception that most of us grew up with and still have clinging to our minds is a distorted view of Jesus. Many of us still see Jesus as that gentle, weak, passive fellow who sits in the middle of the rose garden with the children talking about the buttercups. The middle class Jesus of churchianity for the last 100 years.

But the real Jesus of Nazareth is anything but that. He is the humblest man that ever walked this earth ... true.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am meek and lowly of heart and you will find rest for your souls."

But from the time Jesus emerged from the Jordan River at his baptism until he rose out of his tomb on Easter, he was involved in war ... and he still is. There's a battle going on. It's not a rose garden and it's not a football game, it's a battle for eternal stakes. Remember he comes up out of the river Jordan, receives the Holy Spirit and he's immediately driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. And that temptation was a war, a battle. It was exhausting and it was dangerous.

He overcomes Satan at the door of his own heart, proceeds then into the life of Israel to overcome Satan among his people. And he overcomes Satan by speaking truth against the lies they've been hearing all their lives. He disarms Satan, he sets the people free, he breaks the chains of Satan by healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons. But it's not a one-sided battle. All the time he's involved in these things, the enemy is setting him up for his final defeat. Pontius Pilate and Judas Iscariot and Herod and the Sanhedrin and all the other people involved are pawns in a war. Jesus is arrested away from the crowd at night. He's brought to a hasty trial. Found guilty. Turned over to Pilate. Pilate tries to release him. Fails. Finally he hangs from his cross. And while he hangs from the cross the powers and principalities of this world, Satan and his kingdom, are drooling....

... "We got him!"

And at the moment when they expect to have their victory when he breathes his last and dies, comes the big surprise. There's an earthquake, the veil of the temple is torn in two from top to bottom and the Spirit of the Lord pierces through into the Holy of Holies, the presence of God, opening the way back for the human race ... breaking the curse. And on the third day when he comes forth from his tomb, he has death under his feet.

But the battle continues. That was the decisive battle but the war goes on. And to follow Jesus is not to be saved, wrapped in cellophane waiting for some rapture that's going to take you away from all difficulties and dangers. To follow Jesus in this world is to be engaged in war ... a battle. It's one you could win or lose. You win it for sure if you're in Jesus ... only if you're in Jesus.

And so we read,

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength 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 are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:10-12

We're all of us involved in war and we're out to overcome, to conquer evil, Satan and the kingdom of evil.

And we conquer in four ways.

- We conquer by being strong in the Lord.
- We conquer by being clothed in the armor of God.
- We conquer by directing our fire not at the symptoms of evil but at the causes ... the sources.
- We conquer by opposing evil, not with evil, but with good.

We begin by being strong in the Lord.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

How many times we get up in the morning and look out the window and we think of all the things that we face ... the problems. And the only logical thing is to go back to bed, pull over the covers and never wake up again. They call it depression - and everyone of us knows what this is. If we try to come against those days and those circumstances in our own strength we're done. The answer we're given here is that it's not necessary to try and face it in your own strength ... do it in the strength of the Lord.

... be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27:1

It's a matter of exercising our faith in entering into the strength of the Lord. You look out the window, you think of the things you face and you move forward, even though you don't know how you're going to do it, your knees are shaking but you keep going in the strength of God ... whose strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Second, we overcome evil by putting on the whole armor of God. Inwardly, God's strength; outwardly, the atmosphere of his protection.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High

shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Psalm 91:1

...we're talking about protection.

I will say of the Lord, he is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.

Psalm 91:3-4

And so we're exhorted by Paul to put on this armor.

Therefore take 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 girded your loins with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace, above all taking the shield of faith with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, pray at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance.

Ephesians 6:13-18

Put on the armor of God ... it's possible, it's within our power and we're expected to do it. And if we could only see how serious the issue is we wouldn't mess around.

Thirdly, we conquer evil by directing our fire not at the symptoms but at the cause ... at the source.

Many times we think it's that foreman ... he's driving me crazy. And for people who are in those situations it's no fun. Or maybe someone feels he has a wife who's forever nagging or a husband who's lazy. Or maybe it's those people over there, they pick on me. I'm the minority where I work and they give me a hard time. Those things that people have to live through are not funny, they're serious and they're hard and they're painful and they're difficult. But, what Satan wants us to believe is that this foreman is your enemy. And you can spend your whole life fighting against him and dissipating your strength.

He is the symptom of the evil and he's being exploited by Satan, but he's not the enemy.

Fourth, Paul says,

"We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against the principalities, against the powers against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."

It's necessary that we see through and beyond flesh and blood and see where the source is and that's where we aim. It makes a tremendous difference when we begin to see this and then do battle.

And we do battle finally by overcoming evil ... not with evil, but by conquering evil with good.

And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death." Revelation 12:10-11

Jesus conquered by his blood, by his spoken word and by pouring out his life. His followers in the apostolic age and beyond did the same. And we do the same. We conquer first by the blood of the Lamb. In the twenty-first century that seems so far out. But it's the central reality, it's the source of our power, it's the place where the curse was broken. And when we cover ourselves in that blood and put our confidence in that blood and plead that blood we go anywhere. And the evil around us begins to shrivel and shrink and draw back.

... by the word of their testimony. Many times we have a gospel in our hearts ... thank God for that ... but it's the gospel which is spoken which has power.

... and they overcame him by loving not their lives even unto death ... they spent themselves. They poured themselves out. In our world the name of the game is "get", "acquire", "accumulate", "hold", "keep".

But the economy of the kingdom is the opposite. It's "give", "pour it out", "spend it". The more you do, the more comes in.

This world is not a rose garden. And even where it looks like a rose garden there's a serpent. And the enemy is not playing games. We either conquer him or he conquers us.

Jesus is not gentle Jesus meek and mild with the lovely shampoo and the sunlight dancing off his hair in the garden. He is Jesus the Lamb of God who conquers. And to be his followers is to be in a war. We conquer evil, radical, personal, intelligent, organized evil ... Satan and his kingdom .... by being strong in the Lord, by wearing the whole armor of God, by directing our fire at the source, not wrestling with flesh and blood and by opposing evil with good.

We overcome him,

- by the blood of the Lamb,
- by the word of our testimony,
- by loving not our lives even unto death.

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