

SPIRITUAL WARFARE? SERMON CCCC 9/12/21

Eph 6:12 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. NIV

1Peter 5:8-9a Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith...NIV

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Thank you for the privilege of worshipping with you today! Our subject this morning – and the subject of our upcoming Adult Education Class starting October 17 – Lord Willing - is spiritual warfare. As you may have noticed in the bulletin, the sermon title is Spiritual Warfare, Question Mark. Why the question mark? Well, it's been my experience over the years that most of us evangelical Christians are not real sure what to make of spiritual warfare. As you may know, some Christian denominations **never** talk about spiritual warfare, and other denominations talk about it **all the time**. Some feel that spiritual warfare is **too extreme** for modern ears, and others believe that the gospel **cannot be fully understood** without considering the spiritual conflict that is going on around us. To be sure, it can be challenging to find the right balance on this topic. C.S. Lewis, a theologian of the last century and author of the book *The Screwtape Letters*, said in book's preface: "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves (meaning the devils) are equally pleased by both errors..." May I ask for a show of hands of how many of you are familiar with *The Screwtape Letters*? For those who may be unfamiliar with the book, *The Screwtape Letters* are a compilation of 31 fictional letters written by a senior demon named Screwtape to his nephew, Wormwood, a younger and less experienced demon, who is charged with guiding a man **toward** Satan and **away** from God. If you haven't read it, there are many helpful insights in this little book – some of them quite humorous. Most however are quite sobering. As C.S. Lewis suggests, of course, we do need to have the right balance in spiritual warfare. However, to be honest, for most of us evangelicals the needle of the balance scale is not tipping towards excessive teaching but rather towards very little teaching on this important topic. Why might that be? Well, I'm glad

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you asked - that's an **excellent** question, and I will be sharing what I believe to be the answer to that excellent question as soon as we meet together at 9AM on October 17. This morning however, I'd like to suggest a few reasons why you might want to consider learning more about spiritual warfare right now, and I will start by sharing how the Lord convinced my wife and me of this spiritual need several years ago. Would you pray with me as we begin? [PRAY].

I grew up in a Four C's church in Boston that many of you are probably familiar with – Park Street Church. As my Mom needed someone to accompany her to the city of Boston at night when she went to choir rehearsal, I had the honor of being the youngest person in the adult choir during my teenage years. During the summers I would often hear Dr. John DeBrine preach at various camp meetings around New England - such as Rumney Bible Conference in Rumney, NH - and I suspect that you folks here at CCCC also knew John quite well ☺. In the 1970's I started attending Grace Chapel in Lexington, and in September 1985, my wife Cynthia and I were married at Grace. We both loved the Lord and we anxiously desired to please Him. The following summer we took our first vacation together at Word of Life in upstate New York. During the meetings we were challenged by the speaker to go wherever God wanted us to go – without restriction – and we went forward. Then, within a week after this dedication event, I lost my job! I have to say that I didn't think God was going to work quite that fast!

A short time later, God led me to start a marketing and communications business. We bought a house in the Boston area totally on faith, and within a few months we were surprised to discover that we were expecting a child. Then we discovered that we were having twins. Cynthia said that I nearly passed out in the Doctor's office after the ultrasound. By November 1987, we had a full blown crisis. I had been unable to get a business contract for several months. I had a big mortgage, twins coming, and no money. But God was faithful! A businessman that I had

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never met drove up to the house and gave me a good contract – based entirely on someone else’s referral. Two months later, the girls were born 7 weeks early, but God gave us 2 beautiful, healthy babies. God had also prevented us from changing healthcare providers at the wrong time – saving us \$30,000 that we didn’t have. Over the years, God did many miraculous things to allow the business to grow and provide a living for us and several other families at my church. Every day we were walking by faith, praying together, and listening for His voice in all that we did. Then came the events of 9/11/2001. Hard to believe it’s been 20 years. Predictably, business fell off, but as always I was walking by faith and trusting God to keep the business afloat. This time however the contracts didn’t come, and by December 2002 - after 16 years of operation - I had to lay off all employees, shut down the office, and refinance a business debt. This was a very difficult moment for me. What had gone wrong, I wondered? What had I done? I knew that God had put me into the business back in 1986. I had seen Him miraculously provide contracts and talented employees in ways that had nothing to do with my efforts. Throughout the years I had been testifying of God’s provision and working faithfully in church as a soloist, worship leader, choir director, and deacon - yet I was experiencing something in my life that felt like a Midas’ touch in reverse. Rather than the blessing of God, everything that I touched seemed to go the other way. Things just didn’t “resonate” anywhere. I couldn’t seem to get any “traction”. Then, in 2003, a door opened to work with a New England ministry. I really thought that I had found God’s new direction for my life, and I felt led to start seminary training – something I had been thinking about for over 10 years. Unfortunately however, this ministry job came to an abrupt end in October 2003 due to cutbacks and a change in leadership. As many know, career transition can be a very difficult time. I finally received some comfort from the confusion and disappointment at a men’s retreat in early 2004. Everywhere that I sat that weekend, I seemed to be next to

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someone who had a business failure story that was similar to mine. It was amazing – and I have to say - a little bit eerie. Clearly, I could see that God was at work, and I no longer felt so alone. The verse that constantly came to mind during this time was Matthew 6:33 “But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you”. This verse became my primary goal every day as I followed up on any potential work opportunities and studied to teach college business classes. In the beginning of March, we visited my parents in Florida and I spent 2 weeks walking the beach - praying like I had never prayed before. On the last day of that vacation, I sensed God say that it would be 6 months before I would see substantial employment. I knew that this thought was not coming from inside my own head because it was the last thing that I wanted to hear. I immediately said, “But Lord, I’ve already been unemployed for several months – how am I going to get through this?” And He said “I’ll take care of you”. God further impressed upon my heart that I was not supposed to be anxious as I was looking for work. I was to “be still and know that He was God”. I was to follow-up on what He put into my mind to do, of course, just like I had always done, but other than that, I was to “be still”. If you are a “Type A” personality, or know someone who is, you can imagine how difficult this was. Whenever I doubted that I had heard God’s voice and started to experiment with new income generating ideas, nothing would come of them. During the next 6 months I spent a lot of time each day reading scripture, praying, meditating, agonizing, and praying some more. From a financial perspective, God was in fact taking care of us during this time - through small jobs, part-time teaching, Cynthia’s employment, and parental gifts. At the time, though, I can remember thinking that these things seemed so inadequate to pay the bills – yet somehow the dollars stretched and God met our needs. By the end of August, I felt like I was in the last couple of miles of a long marathon. On Monday morning August 30, 2004, I decided to fast for 2 days

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in preparation for my anticipated deliverance in September. This was the first time in my Christian life that I fasted. At the end of the second day, when it was time to break the fast, I hadn't heard anything in the way of a message from God. However, as I was sitting down to a grilled chicken dinner with my family, my phone rang. It was a friend and his wife who hadn't spoken with us for quite a while. They said that God had stopped them in their tracks while they were out driving and told them to come and pray with us. They were headed in the opposite direction that night, but God had turned them around. They came over and prayed with Cynthia and me, encouraging us that God had heard my prayers. I'm so glad they were listening to God that night! Within three days I had an email from someone that I had only briefly exchanged business cards with during the summer. He asked me to come in and discuss a work opportunity at an exceptional daily rate. I started work exactly 6 months to the day from the time that I heard from God on the beach in March 2004. Praise God! I have to tell you, I was really enjoying God's blessing at the end of 2004 and the first half of 2005! It seemed like I had passed through some kind of door – like walking around in Disney World. One moment I was in NoWhereLand and the next moment I was in Futureland. I loved the work, and the organization seemed to benefit from my consulting in ways that I could clearly see were supernatural blessing. We experienced excellent departmental results. As I was working, I was also praying regularly for the department employees that they would come to know Christ. By June 2005, the business contract was completed and no further work was available. Although I was disappointed, I was not worried. After all, God had miraculously opened this door, and I felt confident that He would open another one. However, as the summer of 2005 progressed, contract work opportunities evaporated, quotations that should have turned into contracts didn't happen, employment resumes were rejected, and the classes that had previously been available for me to teach at the

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Christian college mysteriously dried up. Once again it seemed like I had passed through some kind of one-way door – this time from Futureland **back** to NoWhereLand. This time I didn't hear a voice telling me that the financial dry spell would only last 6 months. This time I didn't seem to be hearing much at all. By the beginning of November 2005 we had to start borrowing heavily against the equity in our home, adding to the old debt that we had been carrying for 3 years since I had closed the business offices. I kept my eyes on the Lord during this time, but a spirit of confusion would often intrude into my prayers. I remember wrestling a great deal about whether "God's provision" should involve the borrowing of money from a bank. Our twin girls were in their senior year of high school, and they were anxiously looking at colleges for 2006. While they were growing up, I had sacrificed a lot of family time because I thought that the company would be there to pay for college. Now, I felt like a man without a wallet on a shopping spree with his family. I had no money and no answers. My mind was stuck in a loop. I had given God my career in 1986 - and He had always, ALWAYS been faithful since that time. To be sure, the business failure seemed unexplained, but God had always let me know that He was there – often delivering me at the 11th hour and the 59th minute, but always there. This time, however, I couldn't seem to feel His presence, and I felt lonely and abandoned. I wondered if this was the "dark night of the soul" that St. John of the Cross wrote about back in the 1500's, and the "Holy Desolation" that the Puritans referred to in the 1600's. In my research, I was amazed at how many verses in the Bible actually talk about this mysterious feeling of abandonment – including prayers that humbly beseech God not to turn His face away. By the beginning of 2006, things had gone from bad to worse financially, and the anxieties of college on top of everything else were straining our family relationships beyond anything that we had ever experienced before.

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It was at this point that I began to suspect that my spiritual enemy – satan - was involved in all this. Throughout my life I had attended conservative evangelical churches, and though I was very familiar with Ephesians 6:12 which states that 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, I really hadn't heard any sermons on the practical aspects of spiritual warfare. I immediately ordered a number of good books on the subject and I immersed myself in the topic. The turning point of the battle came on Saturday morning April 8, 2006. We were continuing to borrow against our house, and we could see that we would be exhausting our home equity line of credit before the girls would begin college in August. I thought it was inevitable that we'd have to sell our home. Relationally, things were not good. A spirit of oppression hung over us, and I was at the breaking point. That morning the girls went out to do some errands, and I sat down in the dining room (which had become my prayer closet during the previous 3 years) to go to battle in the power of the Holy Spirit against the forces of darkness. I was a desperate man. As I had done many times before, I began my prayer in deep repentance and confession before Almighty God, but this time I asked the Holy Spirit to specifically reveal anything that I had missed in previous times of confession that could possibly allow the forces of darkness any **legal right** to oppress me and my family. I went back in my life as far as I could remember, and as specifically as possible I asked for the precious blood of Christ to wash me clean of what I found. I also asked that any **unforgiveness** in my heart would be revealed so that I could repent of it and forgive others as I ought to have done. As we know - but often forget - Matt 6:14 tells us that unforgiveness in our hearts can greatly stand in the way of God's deliverance. Like Job, I then came before God as the High Priest of my family, and in a spirit of repentance I applied the blood of Christ to all of us. I then came against the forces of

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darkness in prayer with an intensity that still surprises me when I recall it. I was speaking very loudly that morning, and it was probably a good thing that the doors and windows of the house were closed - otherwise the neighbors might have called the police! The next afternoon, Palm Sunday, Cynthia and I drove into Boston to an outdoor meeting to pray for revival in the city. As we drove home, we both realized that the terrible oppression that we had been feeling for so long was gone. We still had no idea how God was going to work out our financial problems, but we had a renewed sense of hope that God would provide in His time. About two months later, out of the blue, having nothing to do with any of my efforts, and coming from a direction that I was not even exploring, God opened up a long term contract to develop an on-line training program at a local medical products company. Praise God, the income started flowing again at the end of July 2006 - just as college tuition payments began! In 2010, our girls **graduated college without school debt**, and God has continued to provide and be merciful and faithful to our family ever since. Praise God!

Now, personal testimonies may have some value in encouraging us to look into the topic of spiritual warfare, but let me also suggest a well-known hymn about spiritual warfare written about 500 years ago by a highly respected theologian who is considered the “father” of the Protestant Reformation – Martin Luther. *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* is found on page _____ of your pew hymnal if you’d like to follow along.

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1. A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side, the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name, from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

3 And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

4 That Word a bove all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also;
the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

Psalter Hymnal, (Gray), 1987

While personal testimonies and classic hymns may be helpful to encourage us to explore spiritual warfare, what we learn about it, of course, should be solidly grounded in the Word of God. As such, during our upcoming class from October 17 through December 19, we will be looking into the Scriptures a lot - so make sure that you bring your favorite Bible translation. For this morning, let me suggest seven good, but rarely mentioned reasons why we might want to consider learning more about spiritual warfare - 6 of these are biblical reasons and the last one is from early church history.

Reason 1: SPIRITUAL WARFARE was at the center of Jesus' ministry.

Curiously, most of the types of miracles performed by Jesus were previously performed by Old Testament prophets. Have you ever noticed that? Jesus transformed water into wine – but

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Moses cast down his staff and transformed it into a snake. Jesus walked on water – but Moses parted the Red Sea, and of course Elisha caused an axe head to float on the Jordan River. Jesus healed leprosy – but Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian of leprosy. Jesus multiplied loaves and fishes - Elijah and Elisha multiplied flour and oil. Jesus raised people from the dead- but Elijah and Elisha did too. So what made Jesus' ministry unlike anything that Israel had seen before? In large measure, it was SPIRITUAL WARFARE. Let's turn to Mark 1:27 to pick up the story after Jesus had cast an evil spirit out of a man in Capernaum:

Mark 1:27-28 The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "*What is this? A new teaching* [notice NEW TEACHING] — and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." 28 News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee. (BTW, the parallel passage of this event is found in Luke 4:35-36). Clearly, the Jews who watched this event were absolutely flabbergasted – they had never seen anyone with so much authority over the spirit world. It is also interesting that if you dig into the timeline of Jesus' ministry from baptism to Ascension - approximately 3 years in the view of most theologians - this first Bible-recorded exorcism didn't occur until about the midpoint of Jesus' ministry, and it was at this point that Jesus's fame in Galilee really jumped to a whole new level as we see in Mark 1:28 and Luke 4:36. It was also at this point where the Gospel of Mark really picks up the story about Jesus' ministry in detail. What can we learn from this biblical event today? Well, since Jesus practiced spiritual warfare, and since we are instructed to follow the example of Jesus, perhaps it is wise for us to learn more about it.

Reason 2: Jesus connected SPIRITUAL WARFARE to the appearance of the Kingdom of God on earth

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Just prior to the first exorcism that we just spoke about, you may recall that Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah 62:1-2 in His hometown Nazareth saying: "He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18b-19 NIV).¹ From this passage, it is clear that Jesus's commission focused on setting Satan's prisoners free. Jesus was anointed to lead the Kingdom of God in a cosmic spiritual battle against the Kingdom of Darkness. Jesus set free all who were under the power of the devil (Acts 10:38, Acts 26:18) and He destroyed the devil's works (1 John 3:8). During His ministry Jesus said "...if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt 12:28). Let's take a quick look at this passage in Matthew:

Matt 12:22-28 Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. 23 All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" 24 But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." 25 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 **But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.** NIV

In this event, and again after another blasphemous accusation made against Jesus later in His ministry (Luke 11:20), Jesus connected SPIRITUAL WARFARE directly to the appearance of the Kingdom of God on earth. This seems like another good reason to learn more about it.

¹ *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984)

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Reason 3 that we might want to learn more about spiritual warfare: Jesus authorized His followers to do it.

When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples ahead of Him to preach the Kingdom of God (Matthew 10, Mark 6, Luke 9), He gave them the authority to cast out evil spirits. Later, He did the same thing with His seventy-two disciples (Luke 10). We won't take a look at these passages this morning, but it appears that **Jesus never sent anyone out** to preach the good news of the Kingdom **without giving them the authority to conduct spiritual warfare**. Not only did Jesus expect His disciples to do SPIRITUAL WARFARE, this ministry was inextricably linked to everything that they said and did. Perhaps worthy of note here too is that SPIRITUAL WARFARE could be done by *someone other than* Jesus' disciples. When Jesus was asked whether this practice should be stopped, He told His disciples "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side." (Luke 9:50, Mark 9:39-40). This is an important point to consider for anyone who might think that only the original disciples were supposed to practice spiritual warfare. For the most part, of course, the disciples experienced success in SPIRITUAL WARFARE – saying at one point: "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17). However, in one instance the Bible notes that they lacked some of the spiritual components (faith, prayer, and in some manuscripts-fasting) necessary to achieve a successful exorcism (Matt.17:14-20, Mark 9:14-29, Luke 9:37-43a).

Reason 4: Jesus expected His followers to continue SPIRITUAL WARFARE after His Ascension

In the Great Commission passage in Matthew 28, Jesus said "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to *observe all things* that I have commanded you" (Matt.

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28:19-20, italics mine). Here, Jesus made it clear that *everything that He had taught them was to be taught to future generations of Christians*. Nothing that Jesus taught was to be excluded from this. So if SPIRITUAL WARFARE was supposed to be omitted from preaching the gospel after Jesus Ascended, it is inconceivable that He would not have mentioned this exception in His last earthly instructions to His followers. Does that make sense? As further confirmation of this, when Jesus gave His last words to His disciples prior to the cross He said that in some ways His own ministry was *not even the high water mark* for what would be happening in the future. Jesus said “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father” (John 14:12 NIV).

Reason 5: SPIRITUAL WARFARE WAS regularly practiced by Jesus’ Disciples after the Ascension

The Bible says that the Apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people after the Ascension of Jesus. People brought the sick and those tormented by evil spirits to the disciples and ALL of them were healed (Acts 5:12-16). We are also told that “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched Paul were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and *the evil spirits left them*” (Acts 19:11-12 NIV, italics mine).

Reason 6: SPIRITUAL WARFARE is in the biblical job description of an Evangelist.

You know, SPIRITUAL WARFARE was not only practiced by the Apostles and other disciples – it was also practiced by evangelists. It is interesting to note that only *one* individual in the New Testament is specifically identified as being an “evangelist”. As you may recall, that

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person's name was Philip (Acts 21:8). To help us understand what an evangelist is supposed to do, then, we should look at what Philip did – right? Philip proclaimed the Christ, performed miracles, healed paralytics and cripples, and *delivered many people of evil spirits* (Acts 8:5-7, italics mine). So what does this mean to us? Well, as we all know, we are commanded by Jesus to do evangelism, and since the job description of an evangelist includes spiritual warfare, it would seem that we should learn more about it.

Finally, Reason 7 that we might want to learn more about spiritual warfare: It was the primary factor in the explosive growth of Christianity from 100-400AD

This is extra-biblical historical information, of course, but highly acclaimed historian Ramsay MacMullen – a professor at Yale between 1967 and 1993 and an expert in the early Roman Empire – in his book *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* said the following – and please note that these statements have been assembled here from different parts of the book for the purposes of brevity:

Jesus' authority over the fiercest infestations of satanic power, making them do whatever he wished by a mere word of command, he passed on to his disciples, with instructions to use it. They did. Exorcists by title became early established in the churches... The manhandling of demons - humiliating them, making them howl, beg for mercy, tell their secrets, and depart in a hurry - served a purpose quite essential to the Christian definition of monotheism: it made physically (or dramatically) visible the superiority of the Christian's patron Power over all the others. One and only one was God. The rest were demons...² This...sums up and sharply delineates a great deal that has been discussed in the preceding pages [of the book]: emphasis on miraculous demonstration, head-on challenge of non-Christians to a test of power, head-on confrontation with supernatural beings inferior to God, and contemptuous dismissal of merely rational...paths toward true knowledge of the divine.³

² Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire A.D. 100-400* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 27-28.

³ *Ibid.*, 112

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These statements are truly astounding, aren't they? Although MacMullen highlights other factors that contributed to the unprecedented growth of early Christianity, he makes it clear that **the primary factor** was the practice of SPIRITUAL WARFARE. Today, some parts of the evangelical church call this Power Evangelism. So, what is the present day lesson that we might draw from MacMullen's observation? Well, for those of us who may be concerned about church growth in general, or at Christ Chapel in particular, perhaps we should consider earnestly reading God's Word about spiritual warfare and then seek God's Presence, Power, and Permission to boldly do battle with the forces of darkness in our neighborhoods. I promise you that the upcoming class entitled "Racing to a Bolder Faith" will help us do just that – **IF** God leads you in that direction! Please know, however, that in order to benefit from this class you do not have to feel like you have been specifically called to engage in spiritual warfare. Every one of us can benefit just by learning more about what the Bible says about having a **bold faith**. Please also know that this class does not involve any special reading or homework. For those who have limited time, the biblical material given each Sunday will be understandable and sufficient for each topic. I will also be including a quick review of the previous week if you happen to miss a class. For those who might want to do some additional research on the various topics that we cover each week, optional readings will be suggested. You are also welcome to contact me via email at eric@kingdomtopics.org (repeat) at any time for any questions, and my website www.kingdomtopics.org will soon have a special CCCC page of resources available for your use. I am committed to making sure that there will be something of interest for everybody in the class. OK?

In conclusion, as you prepare for your special Mission's Conference next weekend, I want to encourage you that we are living in a very exciting time in the Kingdom of God! We are

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closer to Christ's return than ever before, and Christian voices all around the world are now **calling us to a bold faith** to get ready for a great outpouring of God's Glory for the End-Time Harvest. All of the many saints who have gone before us could only dream of this exciting time. So let's take this wonderful hope as a personal challenge to build an even bolder faith than we already possess, so that we might someday soon hear Jesus say "Well done thou good and faithful servant".

Let's pray.

Words: 5460 / 125 = 44 min.