

Notes on Ephesians 6:10–20, Matthew 4:1–11
‘Standing in the noise of battle’ 26th October 2025

I love dates, not the ones you eat at Christmas, but history dates and especially those which are truly iconic. The list isn't endless but there are too many to choose from. There is the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805, the battle of Waterloo in 1815, the Plague of 1665 which we're reminded of by Eyam and the Great fire of London in 1666. There is the amazing year of 1966, when Gilli was born, and when England won the football world cup and there is 1940 which didn't go well in the spring, with the evacuation of Dunkirk, yet was also our finest hour in the Battle of Britain in the autumn. Finally, there is the 14th October 1066, which was the Battle of Hastings. We remember this date not because the English won, but because of the impact of the defeat had on our history. I wonder what would have happened if Harold hadn't decided to break his oath and steal the crown? What if William had arrived not as a conqueror to subdue a rebellious people but as a King gladly welcomed by all? The Battle of Hastings was lost mainly because Harold was not able to control his exhausted troops who were unable to hold their shield wall steady. Instead, again and again, they chose to break ranks and chase what looked like tired Norman soldiers down the hill. But being no longer protected by the shield wall they were cut to pieces by the Norman cavalry until the shield wall was so undermanned that they were unable to resist the Norman attacks, who then overwhelmed and killed them. We are all in a war and we're called to stand behind our shields of faith, like Harold had ordered his troops to do. We are to stand and discover what is always true, the battle belongs to Jesus – for Jesus is not only our Captain he is the victor too.

This sermon has taken a very odd route this week. It is a bit like how the Bayeux Tapestry describes how Harold died. We all know the very familiar story of Harold and the arrow in the eye, but this was not how he died. Harold died when he was cut down and killed by William's cavalry who broke through his shield wall. The reason why in the Tapestry Harold's name is by the man with the arrow in his eye is because that was the death usually associated with those who had committed perjury, who had broken their oath, which Harold had done.

In verses 11, 12, and 14 we are encouraged by Paul to do one thing in this battle and that is to stand, to stand and to stand again. Why are we to do this? It is because this is what Jesus did, in his battle against the enemy and he did it in two very different ways which we are to learn from. Firstly, Jesus actively stood against the enemy because he was safe and secure in his identity as the Son of God. In this respect he disbelieved what the enemy said to him. He disbelieved what he said about the bread, as we do not live on bread alone; on what his obedience to the Father was to look like, in that he wouldn't test him; and he would worship the Father alone. Jesus refused to respect the usurper and its claim, he refused to believe its interpretation of Scripture and he chose to trust completely in the Father. Secondly, Jesus was also passive in standing against the enemy. He chose to trust the 'silent' God in times of difficulty, to believe the Bible as the Word of God and to submit in worship to the will of the Father.

As the people of Jesus, we stand declaring Jesus is Christus Victor. We stand rejoicing knowing Jesus has defeated the enemy on the cross and in his resurrection,

as it says in Colossians 2 verse 15. We stand knowing that we face a dangerous foe, as in 1 Peter 5 verse 8, but we stand also knowing its 'bark', if I can say that, is always worse than its bite. Because Jesus is the victor and because he has triumphed completely over the enemy this puts into perspective all that might trouble and disturb us in our individual lives and in our life as a church too.

When we stand, we have before us two choices. The first, is learning to stand alone. I cannot emphasise too much the importance of our own individual love for and walk with Jesus in the midst of this battle. But and this is really important; Ephesians does not agree with our over preoccupation with the individual. Paul repeatedly speaks of the better way of when we stand together as One. He speaks of us as One Body in chapter 2 verses 13 – 16, one Household in verses 19 and 20, one Temple in verses 21 and 22 and a people sharing in One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism in chapter 4 verses 1 – 6. The tactics of the enemy is to sow seeds of disunity that it might divide and conquer us. His tactics include tempting us to follow 'personalities' in the church (1 Corinthians 1 verses 10 – 13), to hurt each other, neglect each other and indulge in the never-ending fascination of gossip. When this happens to you, and because we are imperfect and inconsistent these things will happen, we are to stand and refuse to be divided from our family in Jesus. Gossip is one of the most insidious tactics of the enemy and if you hear gossip whether it be from a staff member, a member of the leadership team or the congregation, what are you to say? You are to say No!! For to indulge in this is to lay yourself, and us as a church, open to what happened to Harold's men and to Harold when they left behind the shield wall. This is why Jesus speaks so often of the need for us to forgive each other, as in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18 verses 21 – 35) and the necessity of church discipline (Matthew 18 verses 15 – 20) to ensure that we learn and grow in cherishing each other and standing together. The Gospel is described as a Gospel of reconciliation between us and God and between each other. We are given this gift so that we may know the amazing depths of his Shalom and his peace in our lives and in our life together.

To stand sounds quite easy doesn't it, but I think we all know how hard it actually is. This is why Paul says it three times because he knows just how hard it is. It is so easy to drop your shield and to leave the line, but to do that is disastrous to you and to us as a church. Therefore, what are we to do? We are to fix our eyes on Jesus, as the writer to the Hebrews encouraged Christians going through a challenging and difficult time to do. And, as in the temptation stories, we are to believe Jesus and what he says to us and not believe the enemy's lies. We are to trust in Jesus and his utter reliability and disbelieve the falsehoods the enemy would have us lean on. We are to worship our God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and not be tempted to trust in the idols the enemy recommends. When we do this, we will stand and we will discover that the enemy has no choice but to flee for that is the promise we have and know in Jesus.