

## **Taking It To The Mat** by Jeff Strite

2 Corinthians 10:3-10:5

When Joe Louis was in his prime he fought "Two-Ton" Tony Galento. Louis was favored to win because 2 Ton Tony loved to fight... but he hated to train. At the first part of the fight, Galento threw his Sunday punch and sent Louis sprawling to the mat. Louis was more surprised than hurt and jumped to his feet without waiting for the count.

But at the end of the round his manager scolded him saying: "You know you're supposed to take the full count when you go down. Why didn't you stay down for nine?"

Louis responded "What, and give him a chance to rest?"

Joe Louis was annoyed.

He KNEW he was better than Galento but he'd been sucker punched and got knocked down to the mat. It so frustrated him, he jumped right back up...and got back into the fight.

What I find intriguing about this morning's text is that we're told we are better than our opposition. In fact, if we fight the way we should we cannot lose against our enemy.

Paul tells us we have weapons that have "divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ." II Corinthians 10:4-5

What Paul's saying is: we have the advantage over our opponent! We have the ability to take our opponent to the mat and win the fight.

And that's great news...

But, the thing is - it doesn't always feel like we have the advantage.

Especially when we find people making fun of our faith, or attacking the church, or questioning Scripture, or putting Jesus down.

At times like that we tend to feel... inadequate.

But Paul says: Not only are you NOT inadequate... you are VERY adequate.

You have the weapons to take the enemy down.

Let me repeat something I said just a moment ago:

If we fight the way we should...we can NOT LOSE against our enemy.

Now, who is our enemy? (SATAN)

In fact, the name "satan" means "adversary".

Satan is our adversary.

Ephesians 6:12 says "... 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."

So our fight is NOT against the people who

- make fun of our faith
- or attack the church
- or question Scripture
- or put Jesus down

They may mightily annoy us, but those folks are NOT our enemies.

In fact, Paul tells us that these folks have been "taken captive to do (Satan's) will" 2

Timothy 2:26

We're not fighting them.

We're fighting Satan.

He's our enemy!

So, if Satan is our enemy, how do we fight him?

Well... we don't.

At least not directly.

Jude tells us that "... even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Jude 1:9

So here we have an archangel - one of the most powerful angels in heaven - having a dispute with Satan. But even he doesn't directly fight Satan. Granted, he's on contending with the devil over Moses' body, but when it comes to the real conflict Michael says "The Lord rebuke you!"

Essentially, he turns the battle over to God.

That's what happens with us.

We DO contend with Satan.

We DO need to protect ourselves against his onslaughts.

But when it comes down to doing DIRECT battle with Satan... we need to turn that over to God. And when we do that... we have this promise: "...the evil one cannot harm (us)." 1

John 5:18

So, if God is the one fighting Satan, what's all this about us having "divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God..."?

Well, this is where it gets interesting.

We don't DIRECTLY attack Satan, but we do DIRECTLY attack his kingdom.

Jesus told us "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:18 (ESV)

Who is the church? (We are)

You and I are the church.

Jesus built us with His blood.

And as the church we are called upon by God to prevail against the gates of Hell.

The gates of hell are the boundaries of Satan's domain.  
We're to attack the gates... and those gates will NOT prevail against us.  
This is the stronghold we've been given the divine power to demolish.  
The gates of hell are the doors to Satan's kingdom and you and I have been empowered to beat those doors down.

So here we are, beating down those gates.  
But are we just beating down the doors to have something to do?  
Oh no... we're going after what's BEHIND those doors.

Do you remember my quoting 2 Timothy 2 earlier? It says  
"Those who oppose (you, you) must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." 2 Timothy 2:25-26

Sitting behind those gates of hell are those folks who have been taken captive by Satan.  
Your job (and mine) is to beat down those gates and open the way for them to escape.

Someone might ask: Jeff, what if they don't want to escape?  
The sad fact is that there are many who don't.  
Jesus said:

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it." Matthew 7:13-14

But there ARE those who DO want to escape.  
We just don't know which ones they are, so we need to hit on as many of them as we can in the hopes we'll find the ones who are tired of the life their living outside of God.

ILLUS: I recently read an interesting interview with Billy Graham. He said:  
"... every group—whether it is at a university or on a street corner, whether it is in Korea or whether it is in a tribal situation in Zaire or in New York, I know certain psychological and spiritual factors exist. ...These include:

1. Life's needs are not totally met by social improvement and material affluence; Even after people attain prestige and power and possessions, there's still an emptiness inside.
2. There is an essential emptiness in every life without Christ, and only God can fill it. Let's say someone is having trouble in their marriage. They go to a Christian counselor and get advice on their marriage. That counselor could give them good Bible advice on their problem and can help them fix the problem that couple faces. The Bible is filled with good advice on how to live your life because God knows US and He created us, and He knows what will work for our lives and relationships.

But if all that counselor did was to fix the immediate problem, he's failed. If that counselor doesn't tie them to Jesus... that family will still have a problem.

It's like living in a home with wiring problems - the breakers to trip time after time. If the breaker trips, what do you do? You reset the breaker. And you can reset those breakers over and over and over again. But the breakers aren't the problem. It's the bad wiring. Until the wiring is fixed, you'll always have problems.

Essentially, until people get Jesus in their lives they will always be miswired, and their lives will always have problems because of that.

3. There is a cosmic loneliness in people.

Wherever Graham went - he found masses of people feeling lonely, in need of the love and acceptance only Jesus can supply.

4. People have a universal sense of guilt.

Why do they feel guilt?

They feel guilt, because they're guilty.

They know they've messed up in their lives.

They need forgiveness... and that's what Jesus came to give them

5. There is a universal fear of death."

People may put on a good face, but when it comes to facing death... there's fear.

Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us that Jesus "shared in (our) humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death— that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."

The message of Jesus – crucified, buried, and RISEN from the dead offers the answer to mankind's constant fear of death. Jesus rose from the grave, and that stands as a reminder that we too (because we belong to Him) will one day rise from the dead to live with Him eternally.

You see, all these truths are universal.

They are true for everyone.

Your friends, your neighbors, your fellow workers, your relatives.

Without Christ in their lives everyone you know will suffer from

♣ Emptiness

♣ Loneliness

♣ Guilt

♣ And fear of death.

And YOU have the answers to those needs in their lives.

You know what that answer is?

That answer is Jesus.

Jesus is the argument that tears down strongholds.

Jesus is the power that overcomes this world.

Jesus said: "...In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have OVERCOME the

world." John 16:33

Who has overcome the world? (Jesus)

Who gives us power to tear down strongholds? (Jesus)

Who enables us to demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God? (Jesus)

You can invite people to church (and we have a great church).

But unless Jesus is the center of all that church does and believes, they will not have the power to tear down strongholds.

You can tell people we have a great worship band on Sunday Mornings.

And we do have a great worship band.

But unless that worship band works at helping us to focus on Jesus as the center of our worship, that band doesn't give us the power to tear down strongholds.

You may tell people you have a pretty good pretty preacher (pause, pose)...

But if that preacher doesn't preach Christ crucified as the power for change in our lives, that preacher give us the power that Jesus can have to make any difference in their lives.

ILLUS: I once read the true story of a skeptic that asked a woman he saw coming out of church why she believed in Jesus. She was cautious and she was about to turn and walk away when the man urgently said:

"No, I'm serious. I really want to know why you believe."

She stopped and thought about it for a moment. Then she began to tell him about the difference Jesus had made in her life. When she finished... she saw tears in the man's eyes

"I'd give anything to believe what you believe."

Now that woman's witness didn't change that skeptic, but it shook him and it brought him to tears. Why? Because Jesus is the power that overcomes this world.

Our repeated message needs to be: Jesus is what has made a difference in MY life.

You've GOT to believe this.

If you're just in the habit of doing churchy things and you haven't focused on why Jesus should make a difference for you... you've got nothing to give anyone. All you'll be able to offer is a social club existence without any true substance.

You have GOT to know why Jesus matters to you!

And once you figure out what difference Jesus has made in your life, then you can begin to tell people why they need Jesus in their lives.

The apostle John wrote: That which... we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 1 John 1:1

What was John saying?

He was saying his witness wasn't about theology.  
It wasn't about his church.  
It wasn't about what HE thought.

No his witness was all about Jesus.  
John had HEARD Jesus.  
He had SEEN Him.  
He had TOUCHED Him.  
This Jesus is the Word of Life.  
And that Jesus is what he preached.  
John knew that Jesus IS the power that can overcome the gates of Hell.

Now, Paul goes on to say that "... though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. II Corinthians 10:3b-4a

And I got to thinking: what weapons does the world use?  
Well, years ago I got a chance to see 'church goers' who used the weapons of this world. They were mean-spirited, angry people who worked behind the scenes to destroy anyone who opposed them. They spread rumors, made nasty comments behind backs and were generally just harsh and difficult folks.

Galatians described the kind of weapons these folks would use this way:  
"hatred, discord... dissensions, factions..." and such Galatians 5:20

Worldly folks figure the louder they shout, and the more in your face they can get, the more likely they are to win the argument.

Now, when I find someone who makes fun of my faith, or attacks the church, or questions Scripture, or puts Jesus down - they make me mad.  
They annoy me.  
They make me want to get in their face and call them... idiots.  
(pause)

They've attacked something I love.  
They've been rude and inconsiderate.  
But Paul writes us that we should not respond in kind:  
"Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.  
Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will." II Timothy 2:23-26

You see, that's not what they expect from us.

They don't expect us to be patient and caring.  
We throw them off balance and actually win points because we've surprised them by our kindness.

ILLUS: That is the concept in some forms of martial arts.  
In those forms of fighting, you can win against an opponent – not by brute force - but by using that person's momentum against them.

Years ago, my daddy was a farmer.  
In those days, farmers would band together and work at harvesting their crops as a team.  
At lunch and dinner times, their wives would put on a big spread of food and the men would gather to eat and joke and have fun.  
But once in a while, things got out of hand.  
One time (dad said) there was one farmer who was something of a bully. He'd get in fights just to prove he was the better man. For whatever reason, this man had decided to make an example of my father, and during one of their threshing meals he started running at dad with the intention of knocking him off his feet and embarrassing him.  
Dad saw the man coming out of the corner of his eye and only had a split second to react. He said "I turned around and grabbed the man by his jimmy-slicker and pulled him on over me and onto his back... then I got on top of him and finished the fight."

You see, dad had surprised this man by doing something he hadn't expected.  
He used the other man's momentum against him, and won the day.

ILLUS: When I was a boy my home church was a thing of wonder. They had a huge congregation and a beautiful building. And every Sunday morning they rang the church bell at 9:30 a.m. to announce that Sunday School was starting.  
Now my home town was also a college town. It was a great college, but it wasn't necessarily a Godly atmosphere. Lots of the students would go out on Saturday night and tie one on (got drunk) and had no intention of getting up at 9:30 a.m. to do anything.  
One such student lived next door to the church building, and when he heard that church bell (probably for the 11th time that semester) on Sunday morning he furiously put on his pants and shirt and shoed and marched on over to the church to complain. He was angry at getting woke up... again.  
I remember watching this confrontation and being puzzled by the response of some of the church leaders. "This is our church. It's our bell. And we'll ring it whenever we want to."  
(Pause).  
Correct me if I'm wrong – but I'm not.  
But I'm pretty sure that wasn't the best answer they could have given.  
They had the opportunity to witness to this man, and they blew it off because it was "their bell" and they weren't going to stop ringing it just because of a pagan student with a hangover.  
They'd have been much better served to have said something like this:  
"Look, we're sorry we've upset you, but we ring that bell because we've got a powerful God we want to share. Tell you what, to make it up to you, we'll take you out to eat at the restaurant of your choice and get you whatever you want to eat. Just give us the chance

when we do that to tell you about why Jesus means so much to us.”

That MIGHT have worked.

Granted, it might not have... but it stood a better chance of changing that young man’s life than getting huffy about who had “rights” in this situation.

CLOSE: I want to close with the true story of a man who worked in an inner-city neighborhood.

He had moved his whole family moved into that part of town and were living in an apartment building to be close to the gang members and other people of that area.

One day as he was walking down the hallway in his apartment building, he noticed two guys smoking crack cocaine. Not wanting his kids to see what they were doing, he asked the two to stop.

The next thing he knew, one of their fists had found its way to his jaw. It knocked him to the ground and he found his nose and mouth were bleeding. He looked up at two men and said:

“If Jesus shed His blood for me, I can shed my blood for you.”

Shocked by his response, the two men fled.

A few days later one of them returned, knocked on his door, and said,

“I have not forgotten your words. If your God is that real to you, then I want to know Him.”