

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 6:15-17 - Spiritual Warfare - Part 3

Just by way of reminder that we are in our final approach in the book of Ephesians. Once we're done with the book, as I usually do, I'll have a couple of Q & A sermons. If you have questions that you've always wanted answered this is a great opportunity. Over the years we've had all kinds of questions: predestination, end times, music, polygamy, abortion. So everything's on the table and often these are the more memorable sermons.

This morning we're continuing to look at this section on the Armor of God. And I think we all know this but this section is just a metaphor for living the Christian life.

Back in 2011 there was a famous Super Bowl Commercial that showed a little boy dressed in a Darth Vader outfit. And he was wandering around the house with the Darth Vader theme playing trying to get things to move using the force. He tries to move the exercise bike, the dog, the washer and dryer, and he's getting frustrated. Finally dad pulls up in the driveway from work and comes inside. And the kid runs outside to try to use the force on the car. He tries and tries and then suddenly the car comes to life! And the kid is amazed, looking around to see if anyone saw that it worked. And then the shot turns to dad who has the remote start in his hand.

And as often happens with Super Bowl commercials, it was one of the most memorable commercials that year, but the problem was people didn't remember what the commercial was advertising. The story was great, but what was the product? It was Volkswagen. And what they learned is sometimes you can have an ad so good that people actually don't remember the thing you're trying to accomplish.

I think the same can be true with the Armor of God. We remember the imagery, we might know most of the pieces. But do we actually put them on like Paul commands us to put them on?

Now, obviously the armor is just a metaphor for how we live out the Christian life. We saw last time we prayerfully saturate ourselves with truth. Satan is the father of lies, so we must be girded with truth and proclaim the truth and live according to the truth.

We also saw that we need to prayerfully remind ourselves of the righteousness we have in Christ - the breastplate of righteousness. The thing that will keep us going, keep us encouraged when the enemy attacks is to be reminded of the perfect righteous standing we have through because the righteousness of Christ was imputed to us through faith.

3) Sandals of Readiness. **Read 15**

Notice that the sandals are sandals of readiness. That's the idea here: The Christian is always ready, always prepared. Prepared for what? For battle. It's like we always have our combat boots on.

In the revolutionary war there were the famous Minutemen. These were young, highly trained soldiers who were ready at a moment's notice to go to battle in any situation. And the deal with the minute men was that these were normal guys: Farmers, shopkeepers, tradesmen. There wasn't really a professional class of military at this point for the Americans. These were just guys who were always ready.

That's what we're called to be in spiritual battle. Always ready. And the metaphor here is that we've got war shoes on. These are the combat boots of the Christian so that the Christian is always ready. More on that in a minute.

Before we unpack this, we need to know that most of these metaphorical pieces of armor are found in other places in the Bible.

In **Isaiah 59:16-17** the armor is described in an interesting way. There's the breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation. There's also some other pieces described: garments of vengeance, and a cloak of zeal. You know who's wearing this armor? Messiah is wearing the armor. Jesus wears them.

"The Lord saw the wickedness of man..."

Isa 59:15b-17a: The Lord saw it and it displeased him, that there was no justice. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede. then his own arm brought salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

And the rest of the description is that he goes to battle against his enemies. There has always been a spiritual battle going on and it's played out in the lives of men and it's Jesus himself who perfectly puts on all the Armor of God.

This is how the Lord Jesus battles enemies, through this armor. Most of the armor that we proverbially wear, Jesus is wearing.

Let me ask you this: Why don't we have a garment of vengeance? Who does vengeance belong to? The Lord. And the Lord doesn't use the church to exact vengeance, he actually uses the state to exact vengeance - **Rom 13.**

But we put on other armor he puts on. Let me give you another.

Isa. 11:5: The Messiah has girded his loins with faithfulness - or another way to translate that is "truth." Messiah girds himself with truth, we gird ourselves with truth.

Let me give you one other, because it applies to us this morning. **Isa 52:7:** how beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion: Your God reigns."

In the OT one of the most important roles in society was the messenger. Sometimes the messenger brought bad news. Remember when Israel was battling the Philistines in **1 Samuel** and they brought the Ark to battle? And the prophet Eli - 98 years old - is waiting for news of how the battle went? And he hears the whole city cry out and it turns out a messenger came from the battle lines. What had happened? The Ark was captured! Eli falls over backward and dies.

Other times the messenger brings good news. Well, the coming of Messiah was good news. **Turn back to Isa 52:7.** We usually come to this passage because it's the clearest place in the OT that shows Messiah was destined to be a sacrifice for sins. **Isa 53** is the He was pierced for our transgressions, he's borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." That whole section. But look at the lead up to that section. **Read 52:1-10**

God's telling his people to wake up and rejoice because he's proclaiming a message. A message that Messiah is going to take away their sins, and give them a glorious inheritance. **Chapter 53** describes Jesus, but what chapter 53 is, is the message the messenger brings about the salvation of Jesus.

And that's the connection Paul is making. Our feet, as it were, are to be ready because we're bringing a message. A message of salvation. That's what the word gospel means: it means good news, a good message. The good message that although we are filthy sinners God looks on us with favor through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection have paid for our sins, we share now in an inheritance, and live as children of the Most High God awaiting his return.

And we proclaim that to other people. "Hey, did you know you can go from being an enemy of God to a child of God through faith in the risen Lord Jesus?"

We bring good tidings of joy: "Did you know your life can have purpose and meaning because God is setting the world to right through the work of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world? And you can be part of that work?"

Remember it's good news to go to heaven. It's good news to escape the wrath to come. It's good news to call on God as Father.

Sometimes I think as Christians we think what we're telling people when it comes to Jesus is bad news. "Sorry to rain on your parade." "This is an inconvenient truth."

No, the Son of God taking on flesh and securing our salvation is a very convenient truth. It's a very good thing and we need to be ready to tell people about it.

Imagine someone giving you the convenient truth to buy Microsoft at \$20 back in 1990. Or NVIDIA a few years ago at \$15/share. The gospel is even better: there's absolutely nothing we do to earn it, and the reward is that we're co-heirs with Christ over all creation for all eternity.

Look back at Eph 6. Read 15

We need to put on readiness. As Christians we believe the gospel and know the gospel. And so we need to be ready to proclaim the gospel.

How many of you get nervous when talking to unbelievers about the gospel? Raise your hand, it's okay.

I can get that way too. How does the gospel of peace help us to be ready to proclaim Jesus?

Let me give you a few things to think about.

1. I have peace with God through Jesus. So I don't have to be a Charles Spurgeon or Ray Comfort when I'm preaching the gospel. I'm Jason and Jesus died for my sins and I'm just going to do the best I can to tell people about Jesus. If I do a bad job I'm not losing my salvation.

I don't want to do a bad job, I want to do a good job. But that means there's trial and error. Have you ever just blown it when talking to someone about the gospel? Me too. Apologize, dust yourself off and on we go.

Your salvation is not based on your ability to perfectly present the gospel.

2. I know that God has predestined some to salvation. Paul says he does all things for the sake of the elect. That means that those whom God has predestined will come to saving faith. That's a promise. Maybe he uses me for that, maybe he doesn't - that's up to him.

In **1 Cor. 3** Paul says he planted the gospel, Apollos watered that seed. But who gave the growth? God did. So all I need to do is what God is calling me to do and God will do the growing.

I think back to the gospel presentation I heard when I was a kid. It was pretty basic. I'm not even sure it was a complete explanation of all the gospel truths but I wanted it. I wanted Jesus.

You look at some of the encounters in the gospels that people have with Jesus. They don't know all there is to know about systematic theology and hypostatic union and the distinctions between ad intra and ad extra revelations of the Trinity. You know what they knew? That Jesus could heal them and loved them and they followed Jesus.

That's not to downplay theology. It is to say that those whom God has predestined he will call and justify - and sanctify - all the way to glory.

3. That frees me up in conversations to actually just have a conversation. You ever start talking to unbelievers and think "Oh man, I don't know what to say, I don't know how to answer those questions." It's okay if you don't know what to say. It's okay if you don't know how to answer the questions.

I think one of the most honest, humble responses to someone asking questions about the gospel is "I don't know. Let me find out and let you know." And then go find out and let them know.

4. Be as prepared as you can.

1 Pet. 3:15: We need to always be prepared to make a defense for the hope we have in Jesus Christ, with gentleness and respect.

And like the saints in **Acts 4** we need to be asking God for boldness to proclaim the gospel. Just because we've got good news doesn't mean it's easy. Satan doesn't like it when we plunder his people for the Kingdom. Nobody takes defections easily.

But just remember, at some point someone had the boldness to tell you the gospel. Someone mustered up the courage to preach to you the good news. Maybe that was your parents or a person from camp or a friend or whoever. God used them as the messenger who was ready at the proper time. They were ready because the gospel of peace made them ready.

Go be like them.

We have to put on, prayerfully put on, the shoes of readiness. We need to prayerfully be asking for God to give us opportunities. Prayerfully be having conversations with people about the Lord. Prayerfully and steadily teaching our children the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.

And the same gospel we're proclaiming is the same gospel that will give us peace.

The gospel we believed in is a gospel of peace.

Rom 5:1 Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The good news of Jesus is that those who believe are at peace with God right now. And if we're at peace with God, we can be ready for whatever else comes our way.

4) Shield of Faith. **Read 16**

The spiritual world is an unseen world. All of the things we know about the spiritual world are really what we see recorded in Scripture. Occasionally we see the spiritual world break through in incredible circumstances. But it's pretty rare.

So all of our lives is a life of faith. We simply trust God at his word. So what's Satan's tactic? It's the same as it's always been. To like and cast doubt on God's trustworthiness.

"Did God really say?..."

It's the oldest lie in the Bible and it's one of the most effective lies in the Bible. We need the shield of faith because doubt is so strong.

What do we doubt?

We doubt God's promises. We doubt that he's really washed away all our sin. We doubt he really loves us as his children. We doubt he's really taken away shame and guilt.

We doubt God's commands. He doesn't really care about this sin. He doesn't care about the greed in my heart. He doesn't really care about that lie. I mean, the lie was for a good purpose, so it's fine.

He doesn't care about coveting my neighbors house or wife or car. He doesn't really care that I dishonor my parents or take a little bit from work.

We doubt that the commands that God has given us are not just good and right, but good for us. And right for us.

I think we doubt God's power. That he really is the all powerful God of the universe that loves to give good gifts to his children. I was convicted the other day as I was praying that maybe I don't actually ask God for enough.

Like a little kid who really wants a pizza for lunch with Dad, but just asks for a piece of bread instead. Do we really believe that God wants us to have good gifts? Jesus over and over says for us to ask God like he's our Father and as our Father wants to give us good gifts.

Do we believe that God is for us?

Do we believe that he loves us?

Do we believe he will reward our sacrifices?

Through faith in Jesus the answer to all of these is yes. All these things we take on faith.

Which means that the enemy wants to destroy us with doubt. The imagery that Paul gives here is pretty vivid.

Read 16

In all circumstances believe. In all circumstances pick up the shield of faith. Why? Because the evil one is hurling fiery darts at us. It's not just any kind of darts, these are like fire arrows that the ancients used to burn down cities.

Satan's not playing. He seeks to destroy us.

I think John Bunyan depicted it best in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian meets Apollyon.

It says he threw a dart at his chest. He's aiming for critical mass. He's not playing around - he's looking to kill.

Christian blocks that one with the shield. But just as Christian pulls out the shield to defend himself Apollyon unleashes the whole arsenal. "Apollyon came at him fast, throwing darts as thick as hail and it was all that Christian could do to avoid it. Apollyon wounded him in his head, his hand, his foot. Christian went back a little. Apollyon went even more...the combat lasted for half a day even until Christian was almost quite spent. Christian because of his wounds grew weaker and weaker.

I won't spoil the outcome but this battle is fierce and the only thing that keeps him alive in this battle is his shield of faith. Unwavering trust in God. It's the one thing that protects him because when the doubt comes it comes in force.

If you've ever had to deal with doubt you know it can seriously disorient you and put you in a bad place. A sinful place.

Have you ever just struggled to believe something? Struggled to do what you know what to do? I think that's often a spiritual battle that we can't see.

I think panic attacks, severe depression, fits of rebellion, cowardice are all often spiritual in nature. It's the fiery darts of donuts that Satan is using to destroy us. Maybe not always, but often.

How do we battle that? Through faith. Through belief.

If you're really struggling with that, if you're in the midst of deep depression or deep sin, just ask yourself: What are you not believing about God? What are you not trusting about God? What promise or command are you rejecting? And what would your life look like if you actually believed it was true and acted like it was true?

It's kind of interesting if you look at Jesus in the gospels, many times he just tells people to believe. Don't doubt. Only believe. And he often chastises people for their lack of faith.

Why did Peter start sinking when he was walking on water? Because he was looking at the storm rather than Jesus.

Why couldn't the disciples cast out the demon of the little boy? Because they didn't believe.

Jesus tells the disciples to feed 20,000 people. They just stare at him. Why? They don't believe it's possible. But with God all things are what? Possible.

So how do we actually use the shield of faith? We prayerfully consider the situation.

Do you doubt God's promises? Then ask for the strength to believe them and rest in them being true.

Do you doubt God's commands? Ask yourself what you would do if you actually believed them? What would that look like? Then go do it.

I've taught 6 kids how to ride bikes and at every point in the process they don't believe they can actually do it. They don't believe it's possible to balance and pedal and turn and stop. Just not possible.

So what do we do? We make them actually pedal, and balance and practice stopping and turn.

We don't just throw up our arms and go "You're right, it's not possible to ride a bike." We don't say that. We actually just go through the motions of someone who rides a bike and you know what ends up happening? They ride the bike.

The same is true with us. If we're struggling to believe something one of the things we do is act like we believe it anyway. Faith without what is dead? Works. So if you're actually doing the things you know to do - even though you might not feel right - what does that mean you have? Faith.

The same is true for us. God has called men to lead their homes, so go start pedaling. God has called wives to submit, so go start pedaling. God has called you to rest in his salvation. So relax.

I remember being in a kind of depression when I was in high school because I was caught up in sin and didn't think God loved me. My standing before God wasn't based on faith. It was based on my own achievements. And I remember it was just like this dark cloud all the time.

And then it was like: what am I not believing here? What am I doubting? I'm doubting God's own word. I'm doubting that God says he's nailed my sin to the cross. I'm doubting that God says he's imputed me with righteousness. I was functionally just walking around like an unbeliever feeling as though I deserved hell. Rather than walking around like a child of God who had been fully justified through the precious blood of Jesus.

And so, why not just take the guilt off? Why not just be joyful knowing that God has taken my sin and sorrow and my shame? Why not just come to the Father in prayer like the perfect child? Not because I am perfect but because Christ was perfect for me?

And it was like a weight of sin off my shoulders. Actually it felt kind of scandalous. I can just be happy that even though I sinned God still loves me? Yes. And I don't want to keep sinning but God's not kicking me out? No.

Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven, whose trespasses aren't counted against him. Blessed, happy, rejoicing.

Have you ever heard of people who are falsely diagnosed with cancer or some life ending disease? Their bodies actually start shutting down and they actually take on the symptoms of a disease they don't actually have. It's called the Nocebo effect. You've heard of placebo? This is nocebo. Our minds are so powerful that believing lies will affect us physically even if there's nothing wrong.

I think the same is true spiritually as well. If you doubt God, if you doubt his commands or promises or power or goodness - if you're believing lies - it will have a real effect on you. And so we are called to walk by faith.

We're called to take up the shield of faith and guard against the devil who wants us dead.

Let's trust the one who saved us.

Pray