

**Holy Cross, Daggett and St. Mark, Wallace Lutheran Churches, Michigan**

**August 18, 2013**

**Ephesians 6:10-20**

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.*

*Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.*

What do you think would be one of the scariest situations in the world? A situation which produces panic or fear? Would it be forgetting everything you studied right when you take a big test? Would it be lying in a bed of snakes for five minutes? Would it be forgetting an important document, say something like a sermon, and realizing you need this document for a presentation you are ready to give in five minutes?

These situations could induce panic and worry. However, they aren't the scariest or most panic inducing situations I could picture myself in. I think the worst situation I could find myself in would be going to war without weapons or armor. I can't think of anything worse than being forced into battle wearing street clothes with zero means to protect or defend myself. I would be an easy target for the enemy and would quickly be killed. The thought of this scenario absolutely terrifies me.

I doubt most of us would ever find ourselves in the terrifying scenario I just mentioned. I doubt if we were enlisted in an army that we would be forced to fight without weapons. Why? Soldiers need weapons to fight. Army commanders know this fact. Their enemies know this fact. Both sides know sending soldiers into battle without weapons means their army will be defeated and they will lose the war.

The apostle Paul picks up this picture of a soldier needing weapons and armor to fight in our second lesson today. He uses a Roman soldier as an example. Roman soldiers were part of the most advanced and best equipped army in the world at Paul's time. The might of these armies allowed the Romans to dominate the Mediterranean world for almost 400 years. Why would Paul use the Roman soldier as an example in our lesson today? He uses it to show us how we are locked in a spiritual battle with Satan.

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"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Paul tells us we are at war against the devil and his allies. The only thing which can save us is God's spiritual armor.

Did you realize that you were at war today when you walked into church? Did you think about it when you got up this morning? Did you talk about it this past week with your friends? Your family? Maybe some of you did, but I didn't. Odds are most of you didn't either. Why? Physical war isn't a pleasant thing to think about. It involves a lot of hard work. It involves sacrifice. It involves incredible danger. It messes with your emotions and disrupts lives. It leaves people battered and broken.

We like to convince ourselves spiritual warfare isn't like real warfare. It is easier than physical warfare. We can deal with the enemy of temptation. We know where the edge is when it comes to alcohol. We

know how to test the limits and have a good time, but we make sure we're just buzzed and having fun. We know what buttons to push to get a reaction, but quickly laugh it off or apologize if it cuts too deep. We're able to look at the beautiful woman or handsome man and not lust after them.

We look at these instances and proudly say we're winning the spiritual battle. Satan hasn't won. He has brought temptation close, however we've been able to fight it off. God must be happy to have a soldier like me in his army. True, we might have measured up to our own standard, but what have we depended on in this fight? Have we put on the armor of God or have we put on the armor of pride?

We can look at our examples. We might think we haven't had too much to drink and we aren't drunk. However, what if we say or do something while buzzed which has lasting consequences? What if we would get caught for drunk driving while "buzzed"? Or punch someone out? Or say something rather offensive which we'd never say sober? We can claim we aren't drunk, but aren't all these things still sins?

What if the words we think are jokes are actually hateful? What if they cause the person to resent and hate us? What if the innocent "look" we give to the other person causes us to wish we had a different spouse? A spouse who was better looking? Resentment caused by harsh words and discontent caused by brief glimpses are sin. They are places where Satan attacks us and wins because he uses our pride to blind us of reality and how we have sinned.

How can we fight Satan off? How can we win the victory over these dark forces? Put on the armor of God. Paul describes the importance of it, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand."

"Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Paul tells us the only way to win the spiritual war is by being armed with the full armor of God.

What is all included with the full armor of God? The first thing to put on is the belt of truth. This wonderful gift assures us we have the truth of God's word. His word tells us about him and what he has done for us. It tells us how he sent his son into the world for us and win the battle over Satan for us. The next thing we put on is the breastplate of righteousness. This righteousness is what Jesus came into this world to win for us.

He won it by laying down his life for us. He won it to win forgiveness for the sins of drunkenness, hurtful words, lust and pride. The breastplate of righteousness covers over all of these sins and God only sees Jesus' righteousness when he looks at us. The next thing we put on are the shoes of gospel peace. These shoes are the peace which we have knowing the breastplate of righteousness covers over our sins and God doesn't see them when he looks at us.

The next thing he gives us is the shield of faith. This shield blocks us from all the attacks of Satan when he tries to remind us about past sins. This shield protects us when he brings fiery temptations and tries to get us drunk, to use improper speech, to lust or to be filled with pride. This shield assures us of the miracle the Holy Spirit worked into our heart. The miracle we are God's forgiven child. This shield isn't the last piece of armor. God gives us the helmet of salvation.

This helmet protects us in every situation. It cannot be dented. It never wears out. It promises us salvation and eternal life are ours. Lastly, he does give us one offensive weapon. He gives us the sword of the Spirit. The sword of the Spirit allows us to attack and ward off our enemies. The sword of God's word sends them running. They can't stand up to it. They can't resist it. It cuts them, defeats them and breaks them every time.

Getting stuck in a battle without armor or weapons is a scary thought because it means a quick and certain death. This is certainly true if we try and fight our spiritual battles with our pride rather than God's armor. How so? Our pride will make us victims of temptation instead of victors over it. We'll rationalize our sin. We'll excuse our sin. We'll have lost because our enemies are much more powerful than we are.

Thankfully, God has given us his armor to protect us. Put it on and use it. It will help you, "Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Amen.