

Ephesians 6:10–20

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[0 : 0 0] it reads like this finally be strong in the lord and in the strength of his might put on the whole armor of god that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the cosmic powers over this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places therefore take up the whole armor of god that you may be able to withstand in the evil day and having done all to stand firm stand therefore having fastened on the belt of truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and as shoes for your feet having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace in all circumstances take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one and take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of god praying at all times in the spirit with all prayer and supplication to that end keep alert with all perseverance making supplication for all the saints and also for me the words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly proclaim the ministry of the gospel for which i am an ambassador in chains that i may declare it boldly as i ought to speak this is the word of the lord thanks be to god you may be seated well good morning i'd like to give my welcome to those of you who are visiting and in town with us this weekend for some special event or family gathering we are so glad that you're here i want to title this message the unexpected the unwanted but without which we're undone something is unexpected even unwanted but without which we're undone imagine yourself this morning in a clothing store perhaps you're along the magnificent mile or you're at nordstrom rack in oak brook maybe you're at tj maxx or at h&m; along state street you're waiting there for a family member who's in the fitting room let's say he or she has been trying on some jeans perhaps some new shirts for the summer finally the door opens and you encounter something entirely unexpected you're so surprised that you're not sure whether to break out in laughter or to simply gasp in shock for your brother your sister your father your mother whoever it was that came out of that dressing room was approaching you arrayed in a full on set of medieval armor i mean complete with the helmet the buckler the buckler and sword from head to toe they are standing in the hardened garb of shining silver and then from behind their fixed metallic visor you can make out the muffled sound of their voice fits perfect don't you think i'll take it unexpected such was my surprise this week when confronted in a fresh way with this text the imagery of the church and all the pronouns here are you plurals not the individual christian but he's envisioning the church

exiting the fitting room of this letter dressed as a divine warrior it's entirely unexpected it seems out of place but then as i thought about it during the week i'm sure my own preaching and that of my two colleagues contributed to my misunderstanding there were times after all from chapter four on ever since the writer began using the phrase of put on and take off that i would say things like those old ill-fitting t-shirts in your closet that you're hanging on to need to go the three of us as preachers began to speak of the wardrobe of the redeemed the garments of the christian we began to preach as though you were to walk out arrayed in the clothing of christ but nowhere along the line did we prepare you for this kind of dress and yet as we will see this armor was in paul's mind all the way through the letter itself unexpected the church unexpected the church unexpected verses 10 through 15 what are they they are standing firm on a battlefield of war this uh unit of thought which contains many lines in your bible really has the ongoing ripple and the gathering stream strength of the sound that emphasizes standing firm in this militaristic manner of stance did you hear it verse 11 that you may be able to stand against something or verse 13 therefore take up the armor that you may be able to withstand in a particular day or even at the end of verse 13 having done all to stand firm and then that lead verse lead voice in verse 14 stand therefore the the armory with which the the armory with which the church exits the fitting room of ephesians is with the emphasis that she would stand firm think of it as yield not think of it as there is something to resist and in this day

and age when the inclusivity of love within the church gets confused with the unconditional nature of love within the church the church has opened herself up resisting nothing at many points unconditional love of entrance yes this this all-inclusive stance of the church according to this no you're to stand firm there is something to resist this is the posture of christ's church in the letter to the ephesians why why this unexpected stance well i think it has something to do with power in the text some things we're not aware of in regard to power look at verse 12 certainly there are outside powers he says verse 12 for we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities against the cosmic powers over this present darkness against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places why must the church adopt the stance of an army arrayed for battle why verse 12 for there are outside powers that would undo the activity of god in the world the unseen is through this letter now seen i was thinking about this sense of evil powers and uh the state of the church today and evidently we need we need a great awakening we don't see this do we we need a spiritual awakening yes we need in some sense to be awakened to the truth that the church god has determined to plant here on the world on the earth is a church that in his perspective is already behind enemy lines we have to somehow have within us the mindset of the marines who have gotten used to the hard fact that they must operate behind the lines inside actively contested spiritual spaces how often do you awaken with that though i am operating within inside spiritually contested spaces this is the reason he says we're to stand firm this is why we are forward facing this is how we are to be resolute therefore the battle we are engaged in is in some sense even in the text here not depicted as us going forth and running all over but merely standing having been birthed by the resurrection of christ having learned how to walk in the power of the spirit it is for the purpose of being firm in our stance in this world standing has the connotation that the war will come to you you don't have to chase it it's coming front steps but you have to be ready to stand in such a day it's not a physical war lord help us it's not a political war lord have mercy on us it's not an agitated street war it's not against people even per se kind of war it's against unseen powers unexpected but very real therefore we at christ church chicago are not to be those that are tempted to turn and run you ever get tempted to turn and run yeah you have to actually be ready to stand you know legend has it that william of cock of normandy the conqueror who landed on england shores in 1066 or so had some thousands and thousands of soldiers and the legend has it that the 70 ships that came along with him he burned them it's probably more accurate to say that cortez actually did that in mexico when they overtook later the aztec empire but they were signals legendary or real that the commander of the army wanted all the soldiers to know there's no going back from here we either fight from this position or we die we're in stand and so too the church finds herself as god's beachhead in a world gone rogue that's what the church is the rescued ones who are now god's outpost in a world when you think of the book of ephesians you can almost think of it in three spheres the omnipotent power of god in the heavenlies through whom the resurrection of christ comes and gives you life the outside powers that are in defiance to god that's kind of how stand in the earth and they rule the earth and the church is the sphere in between the two there's nowhere for you to go stand fight or die trying that's not the only reason why though it isn't just because we have these outside powers that he adopts the analogy of this warrior he also adopts the analogy because he's aware of god's omnipotent power and your need of it look again at verse 10 finally be strong in the lord and in the strength of his might literally in the power of his might god has the omnipotent power you and i do not if this is what we are to do stand firm and the reason for which we do it is there are other powers contesting it we are going to need the one power above all powers this has been dominant in the letters thought throughout think even back of this word power think all the way back to chapter one when he begins to speak of the prayer in verse 19 he wants them to know what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward those of us who believe according to the work of his great might and that work was manifest in resurrecting jesus from the dead it's the same prayer request come down the strength of chapter three in verse 18 i want you that you would have strength that is power to comprehend with all the saints what's the breadth length height and depth and to know the love of god that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with the fullness of power so this church arrayed in silver medieval garb is there because there are outside powers but you have been rescued by a greater power and you need his power so the church that is at war ought to be a church on its knees asking for the prayers of paul in this letter to actually be manifest in our own life let me tell it to you this way there is no electrical power generated except from some primary source of energy and you know i didn't come up with that on my own there is no electrical power generated except from some primary

source of energy and there is no power in the church except that which comes from god our power then has for its parent the power of god in the resurrection of christ that saves us that saves us redeems us births us walks us and now stands us to live for him and without that divine power we have no ability to generate anything on our own strength the church then is a soldier because there are powers that are too great for us powers that are not within us but there is the power of god that has been birthed within the church unexpected but as you begin to look at the latter part of verse 14 and on

it's not only unexpected we'd have to say that this truth this militaristic truth is even unwanted we don't want to think of the truth or the church as bearing the weapons of war it's uncomfortable and yet here it is 14 through 18a having fastened on the belt of truth having put on the breastplate of righteousness as shoes for your feet and readiness given by the gospel of peace in all circumstances take up the shield of faith which which you can extinguish the flaming darts of the evil one and put on or take up the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit all of the armor and its artillery we are to be wearing as his bride well that's quite a wedding dress

[17:26] I didn't think of it before now but another image this is the wedding dress of the church until we greet him at the wedding of the lamb he gonna he gonna look at us coming at him clank clank clank tarnished dented battle-worn bride it's unwanted though isn't it in the old days they called this ecclesia militants let me get it to us the militant church the church militant it was a term that originated in the mid 1500s or so I am told it's meant to distinguish the victorious saints the victorious church those who have already died in faith and are present with the Lord awaiting the consummation of the age it distinguishes them the victorious church for all the saints you might know from those of us who are yet here we are the militant church we are the ones yet actively enlisted in war making we are the ones who are working out our salvation the church then was thought or comprised of itself as a militia in some way every member of necessity waging war in the daily battles against the world the flesh and the devil and the reason sometimes we have so little victory in our own life is because we are not wearing much armor as we enter into our day the world runs over us my flesh runs over us the devil cannot overtake us why?

because we are not wanting unwanted to think of ourselves in this way in fact you might say that this idea of the militaristic metaphor for the church is falling on pretty hard times let me concede in many respects for very good reasons I mean how abusive we don't have to go far to think about the terrible abuses going on today in regard to metaphors of military strength actually finding their way into real world but it's a detriment of the church if we can't begin to think our way clearly and decipher and distinguish these metaphors in regard to those times I mean given the crusades given the religious sectarian wars given the present and rising instances of rogue violence given armed hatred given all these things I completely understand why this term this metaphor is unwanted I mean you want to speak of the church as anything other than the church militant don't you?

I mean bring this one up in conversation over lunch tomorrow we'd rather speak of the church missional the church merciful the church mystical the church who makes all things new we'd rather speak of the church as a hospital or church hospitable we'd rather speak of the church trying to meet the needs of unchurched Harry and we'll be more comfortable we ought to trumpet the sounds willingly of the church transforming give me a church in transition give me a generous church give me a serving church give me a hurting church especially give me one where the hearts are frail and the faithful are firing on all cylinders but the church militant no the connection to anything even without a connection to the material weaponry of war no we're not ready for it it's unwanted but here it is so let me ask the question where does he come up with this from

I mean are you going to win people to this image in our day where is Paul coming up with this unwanted metaphor we saw why he came up with it but where take a look this is really interesting I don't think he comes up from from Rome I don't think he's a Roman citizen and he's in jailed in Rome and he's looking at the people who are guarding him no I don't think it's the sense that he lived in an imperialistic culture where the war machine ran the world the language in verses 14 through 18a too strongly complements the Old Testament rather than his own day it equates the church with the activity of God not the emperor under whom he was now imprisoned turn back take a look put your eyes on it

Isaiah chapter 59 where God is seen to come to our world in a day when our iniquities had separated ourselves from him in a day verse 3 where we had blood on our hands but in verse 14 in that time of chapter 59 Isaiah writes that justice had been turned back righteousness stood far away

truth stumbled in the public squares these are all terms in our text truth is lacking he says and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey the Lord saw it that as Yahweh saw this day it displeased him that there was no justice and look what happens he saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no one to intercede then his own arm brought him salvation that words in our text and his righteousness upheld him that's in our text and he put on righteousness it says as a breastplate and a helmet of salvation on his head and he put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak according to the deeds so will he repay wrath to his adversaries repayment to his enemies to the coastlands he will render repayment so they shall fear the name of the

[24 : 09] Lord from the west and his glory from the rising of the sun there was a prophetic promise that God whose authority had been rebelled against in the heavenlies would now come and displace the dominion of where all those rebels ran on earth and he would do so by being himself a victorious warrior you can't unseat a rebel without warring against him this has always been there just talk to any old testament scholar in our minutes you can go all the way back to exodus 15 can you not see that when God brought his people out of Egypt and they sang that great song they viewed God immediately the first moment of like redemptive like work they praised him for the horse and the rider he's thrown into the sea our God has triumphed victoriously they

God himself reveals to us in the word that he is the victorious warrior warrior and so then what happens even in Zechariah chapter 9 which usually is read in a day in church where we have the triumphal entry Zechariah chapter 9 we see this moment where the irony of the way God actually accomplishes his victorious war takes place Zechariah chapter 9 verse 9 a rejoice greatly O daughter of Zion shout aloud O daughter of Zion behold your king is coming to you righteous and having salvation as he and here it is humble and mounted on a donkey on a colt the fowl of a donkey from which he cuts off the chariot of Ephraim that's the irony of the New Testament just as you were this is what was unseen that Jesus would come and he would say

I am the truth that Jesus would come and stand before Pilate and indicate they're not fighting because my kingdom is not of this world that Jesus would come in righteousness and in peace indeed after the resurrection he would give his peace having defeated the enemy on the battlefield through his own death on the cross God raised him up and seated him above all authorities that those who believe in him would be rescued from the throes of the devil set into his own family without ever leaving this world that's the importance of the church you are the rescued remnant bought by the battlefield blood of my lord and now having wondered where he comes up with this having situated in prophetic promise having undergirded it with the Torah and the way God has always revealed himself having looked at it in regard to what Jesus actually ironically fulfills Paul now says it's yours you dress as Christ dressed truth righteousness think about it don't you just love the way that this is here stand there for having fastened on the belt of truth the first thing you do I mean what do we already learn about truth in this letter earlier all these words have been there he's actually said earlier in chapter 4 that Jesus himself is the truth so what do you gird around your waist Jesus put Jesus on before you go out the door don't open that fitting room door till Jesus is on that's why it's first and then he actually says here you got a breastplate of righteousness well what kind of righteousness are we talking about here what kind of gospel is given to us by way of peace do you not remember in chapter 2 where he broke down a wall of hostility not only between you and God and brought his righteousness to you vertically but peace which he says comes horizontally between Jew and Gentile so the very terms that are here in the climactic moment of the letter have already been employed by Paul to indicate the work of the church the righteous proclamation of Christ for all to come and have salvation yet the breaking down of that wall the militaristic overthrow of everything that separates

Jew Gentile black white red yellow green whatever it may be Jesus in his peace breaks it down and that's the work that's the work you do when you leave this place how do I employ this text what do I do with my garments make peace oh that it would happen in the smallest of ways if 200 people walked home one day out of church and said you know what if Jesus in his warrior robes has broken down a wall of hostility that separated people who were unlike them then I am going to intentionally invite someone unlike me to my home for dinner it's going to start there if he has put us at his table why am I never at my table with those for whom he has done this in all his fullness that's a person going to war in the way that a Christian ought to walk one writer put it this way all the armor here provided is for fighting not to secure the Christian by flying there's a great did you notice

this guess what there is no piece of armament here for your back

[31 : 01] I mean Bunyan picked up on this right at least the old school folks among us or I should say the old timers among us the Christian saint in Bunyan's program's progress enters into a valley of humiliation I'm filling it in now for those who have never read the book more published than any other book outside the Bible in the English language but what he writes is that poor Christian was hard put to it for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul fiend coming over the field to meet him his name is Apollyon then did Christian begin to be afraid and to cast his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground but he considered again that he had no armor for his back and therefore thought that to turn the back to him might give him the greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts therefore he resolved to venture to stand his ground for he thought had I no more in mine eye than saving my life it would be the best way to stand so he went on and

Apollyon met him you can't turn and run on this folks it may be unexpected but there's sufficient reason for the metaphor it may be unwanted but there's sufficient understanding in the scriptures on how God separates this out from what we don't like today and believe me it will come with a cost casualties on the field Christian brothers and sisters waylaid the old hymn for all the saints composed in the 19th century to celebrate all saints day the first Sunday in November in celebration of the saints who are now triumphant no longer militant first verse for all the saints who from their labors rest who thee by faith before the world confess thy name oh

Jesus be forever blessed hallelujah hallelujah thou was their rock their fortress and their might thou lord their captain in the well-fought fight thou in the darkness dread their one true light hallelujah hallelujah and then he says to his own person singing the song and when the fight is fierce the warfare long steals on the ear the distant triumph song and hearts are brave again and arms are strong hallelujah hallelujah this is the church this is god's vision for the church unexpected!

like a soldier standing firm unwanted but we are to be like soldiers in real battle to what end to what end well look at the end of verse 18 and 19 to that end keep alert with perseverance making supplication for all the saints and also for me that there's a purpose clause to what end that the words may be given to me and opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel for which I am an ambassador and change that another purpose clause that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak the reason that the church carries herself in this dress is so that the church herself will be preserved rather than overrun and so that the mystery of the gospel upon which this letter began would continue to make headway in the world the reason the gospel is not making as much progress as you might think in the world is because the church is ill equipped to see herself in full battle array on her knees praying all the time for all people in all ways so that the word would continue to go so that out from this outpost as the doors swing open and men and women of this congregation enter back into the world and they interact with others the Holy

Spirit will empower you to make Jesus name known and in making him known some not all but some will say and where did you hear that from you say well it's a thing called the Bible we take a look at it every week why don't you join me next Sunday this is the church that the mystery of the gospel would be boldly proclaimed till the final day I'm done unexpected unwanted but without it we're undone let me finish with a silly story well not silly but just another indication of the day in which we live some of you may have heard of a song called onward Christian soldiers you may have heard of it I doubt you heard it if you're very young but those of us who are now in our seventh and eighth and ninth decade we still remember singing that one as a young word onward

[36 : 51] Christian soldiers marching as to war with the cross of Jesus and then it kept going I don't remember all the words anymore so long it's been since I sung it you know there's an attempt made in the 1980s to take it out of the United Methodist hymnal it was an attempt made in 1982 to take it out of the Episcopal hymnal it was in 1990 and in 2013 and in 1977 taken out of the Presbyterian Church USA hymnal it has been taken out of the Australian hymn book it has been taken out of its successor together in song in 99 it has been taken out of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America 2006 hymnal the spiritualist national union hymn book has a variation of it but they've changed the language to onward comrades onward well that wouldn't have gone anyway but in some

Anglican hymn books it's now replaced with onward Christian pilgrims which I get but something here is lost when the church recovers the unexpected metaphor soldier when the Christian maturely thoughtfully with qualification knows how to speak and embrace the unwanted metaphor of artillery then perhaps an undone word not going forth might once again emerge let me put it to you simply

as I can if there were portraits hanging in the auditorium we would all gravitate to the suffering servant as we should

Christ and the cross we would all gravitate to the servant leader Jesus on his knees towel in hand wash basin at foot but we would not be all we are to be without a portrait of the victorious warrior not ready to lay down his or her armor until called home our heavenly father we take these texts week by week which shock the ear and I know that it would be very easy to miss here given the day in which we live but I ask Lord that you would make us gentle warriors humble men and women who emerge from the fitting room of this letter in full orbed array unashamed to say it fits perfect don't you think

I'll take it Lord hold us fast in Jesus name amen