

Think Like a Soldier

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. Hey, and as always, we'd love for you to check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But listen, our heart is simply this. We want to get into the Word of God, but most of all, we want this Word to get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Christ.

Now, when I was in Bible College, we had a large group of students just for kind of a fun night who went to a St. Louis Blues hockey game, professional hockey, NHL, and yet I realized that I'm probably talking to people a lot like me from Indiana where you'll rarely find a passionate hockey fan unless they've moved into the area.

But I can tell you as a person who appreciates most sports that hockey is one of the best to watch in person. And much like baseball, it's one of those sports where you remember what your opponent has done in the past.

If you think they took a cheap shot in the previous game, then listen, it's not over. We're coming after you tonight. Well, there must have been some bad blood between these two teams because the second the puck dropped, two big dudes throw down their gloves, rip off their helmets, and they just start wailing on each other.

[1 : 18] And if you know anything about hockey, this is what the fans live for. It seems like fighting is as much a part of the game as scoring goals. And there's a reason why these famous world-class athletes usually only have about half of their teeth.

But I have to tell you, and this probably just shows how big of a wimp that I am, but I've never understood why they rip off their helmets. Man, if it were me, I'd leave it on.

Man, statistically, you have about a 50% chance to win the fight. I think it goes up if he rips his helmet off and you keep yours on. You can take a few more shots and you can keep going.

Because listen, without that helmet, you're exposing your head. And the right shot can turn the lights out pretty quick. Well, hey, welcome back here to week number seven of this series all about spiritual warfare, all about our call to stand firm in his power, putting on the full armor of God.

If you'd like to follow along, go ahead and grab your Bibles. Go to Ephesians chapter 6, probably about 90% of the way through your Bible. But you know, we're spending a solid couple months here on this important topic because the reality is that we're in a spiritual battle with enemies that are vicious.

[2 : 39] The world and its system around us that almost always stands in contradiction to God's word. We have the inside cravings of the flesh that love to pull me towards selfishness and pride.

And then don't forget Satan and his army that are absolutely salivated at the idea of stealing, killing, and destroying anything connected to God's glory.

And yet, so many believers, and you and I both can fall into this, we can get so ho-hum in our faith, so lackadaisical that we don't even have the spiritual eyes to see the battle going on for our hearts and our minds.

And guys, that leads us absolutely into spiritual defeat. Not walking in the victory available to us as children of God. You know, it's kind of like the old story of the kid who goes off to Bible college. Maybe you've heard this. Mom and dad are worried about him, so they give him a brand new Bible. Dad says, son, this is going to take care of you just fine when you're in need. So the boy shrugs it off, excited about his newfound freedom, and he throws the Bible under his bed.

[3 : 48] However, he quickly learns that life on your own isn't so easy. And so when he is in a pinch, he'd call his parents and ask for money, but their answer was always the same.

Have you looked in God's word? And he'd go, sure, yeah, whatever, thanks for nothing. And he'd go on continuing to struggle, ignoring his Bible.

Well, one day as he was packing up to move, he finds that Bible under the bed. He flips it open to see those promises. And do you know what he discovered? Mom and dad had highlighted about 10 Bible promises.

And in between the pages where each promise was, so 10 of these, they put a crisp \$100 bill. Here he was struggling when the proper resources were there all along.

And you know what? Followers of Jesus do this all the time when it comes to spiritual warfare. The Lord has given us this spiritual armor to put on every day.

[4 : 48] And how often do we just kind of march forward in our own strength and get spiritually slaughtered? So let's do this. Let's keep talking about how we can charge forward in the victory of Christ as we come to the helmet of salvation.

And hey, I'm going to be honest. I had to wrestle with this one and study this one out pretty good. So if you look at Ephesians 6, verse 17, we're just going to look at the first half of that verse. It's actually five words to be exact. It says, Take the helmet of salvation. See, it all comes down to what Paul is talking about with this word salvation.

Because he already knows he's writing to believers who've been forgiven and redeemed by the blood of Christ. Who've put on the belt of truth and clothed themselves with the righteousness of Christ.

We call this justification. So he's not talking about that initial heart change when you repent of your sins and you get baptized into Christ, becoming a child of God, as amazing as that is.

[5 : 58] That's not what he's talking about here. He's not even talking completely about this idea of working your salvation out with fear and trembling, like Paul talks about in Philippians 2.

The notion of pursuing a holy life in Christ, putting on that breastplate of righteousness and running the race of life, the marathon of life, growing daily in your walk with Christ.

No, the Apostle Paul here, his eyes are even higher than that. He's talking about the hope that we have in eternal glory with Christ. He's referring to you and I always keeping a heavenly focus.

See, in the church world, it's often been said that the best way to interpret scripture is by going to other scripture. So let me show you another passage here from Paul that helps us to see this more clearly.

1 Thessalonians chapter 5. I want to start here in verse 5 and then we'll skip ahead a little bit. But it says, You are all children of the light and children of the day.

[7 : 02] We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So we see Paul making this comparison of light and daytime representing good and holy and godly and night and darkness representing evil.

And then we skip down to verse 8 here in 1 Thessalonians 5. It says, But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, now watch this, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath, see he's talking eternal here, but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, did you see that? The helmet of salvation is referring to that glorious day when we as disciples of Jesus will stand before him, covered by his righteousness because of what he did on the cross.

And hear those words, Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into your rest. So today I simply want to ask you a couple questions that I think will help us better understand this.

And then as we do that, we're even going to talk about how to practically put on the helmet of salvation and think like a soldier. So here's the first question that we have to answer before we get to the meat of this passage.

[8 : 25] Do you walk in the assurance of your salvation? As a follower of Christ, are you sure of your salvation? See, last week my family had a little bit of a curveball thrown into the schedule, which is hard for a very task-oriented person like me.

But the week was already busy. And then we get a call from a friend from Tennessee, the church that we used to pastor at. And her mother, Miss Lou, who was also in the church, we loved her, we knew her, she was wonderful, and she had passed away.

And so her daughter asked if we could make the trip down so I could preach the funeral. Well, this sweet and sassy Southern Belle had struggled with some major health concerns for a while.

And finally, at around 75 years old, her body just gave out. And as hard as it was to lose her on this earth, and yes, this family was grieving, they're going to miss her something terrible.

But I saw a family that had hope. And I saw a peace because they know exactly where she is, that she's now with Jesus, because that's the reward for faithfully following Him just like Miss Lou did.

[9 : 38] See, too many followers of Christ don't believe what God's Word teaches over and over. One of those passages is 1 John 5, starting in verse 11.

It says, And this is the testimony. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life. Whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

He says, I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, listen to this, so that you may know that you have eternal life. Man, I love that. So you may know that you have eternal life.

You don't have to wonder. You don't have to hope that I hope I can make it in. I hope I'm good enough. It doesn't work like other world religions where they say your good has to outweigh your bad.

We can't earn it. We don't deserve it. And yet our God is so full of grace that He saw our lost state. He went to the cross, died one of the most excruciating deaths, the death that we deserve, so that we, by faith, could have eternal life.

[10 : 47] And no matter where we've been, no matter what we've done, no matter who our mama is or mama isn't, there is grace and there is forgiveness that await those who belong to Jesus.

And yet life is hard, isn't it? And Satan loves to make us question this. I mean, even your most faithful pastors question stuff like this when times get hard.

I get it. But that's why it's important to put on the helmet of salvation. But before we even get there, go ahead and flip in your Bible to the very last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation.

Chapter 21, Revelation 21. And I just want to read a couple important passages that give us a glimpse into how amazing eternal glory with Christ will someday be.

And I know it's hard to wrap our minds around this and these passages are even a little mysterious in some ways, but I just want us to grab a hold of a glimpse, but a glimpse of how amazing heaven will someday be.

[11 : 49] Revelation 21, starting in verse 2. John says, I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

Now watch verse 4. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There'll be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

Praise God for that. And then if you'll jump just one chapter ahead with me, Revelation 22, starting in verse 1, God's word says, then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city.

On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.

[12 : 58] The throne of God and the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever.

Like I said, it's hard to wrap our minds fully around how amazing heaven will someday be and that's okay. But what we need to understand is the assurance that we can have our salvation if our faith is fully in Christ.

Listen, you don't have to be like the old man in my first ministry who had been an elder, a deacon, a trustee about everything else in the church and after his wife passed away and I get it, he was grieving.

We all in our grief probably doubt things but he looked at me and he said, Ray, we were talking about how he would see his wife again someday and he said, Ray, I just hope that I will.

I hope I can make it to heaven and I looked him right in the eyes because I needed to be bold in this moment and I said, listen, you don't have to hope, you can know. You can know that you know that you know because you have Jesus.

[14:09] It's not about what you've done. It's about what Jesus did for you on the cross and by the empty tomb and if you by faith have repented of your sins making him the Lord of your life, if you've been baptized into Christ like scripture teaches all throughout the New Testament and if you're walking with him daily filled with the Holy Spirit, listen, your sign sealed and someday will be delivered to eternal glory.

You know, I like how the radical hymn writer Fanny Crosby put this in 1873 and people look at me crazy when I say that she was a radical hymn writer because they view Fanny Crosby as this sweet old lady now but I'll tell you she played on a piano which was a bar instrument back in the 1870s.

So many people wanted nothing to do with a piano in church. It caused all kinds of division and she was writing these newfangled songs. They like their old songs. Sounds familiar, doesn't it?

Well, she put it like this. She said, Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine, heir of salvation, purchase of God, born of a spirit washed in his blood.

Oh, this is my story. This is my song praising my Savior all the day long. So let me ask you a second question. If you are a child of God, according to the truth, you can be sure of your eternity.

[15:34] You know the end of the story even though the spiritual battle rages on right now. You firmly grasp your position of victory that no one can snatch away from you.

So let me ask you this second question. Do your thoughts reflect eternity? Do your thoughts reflect your eternity? Because this is what it means to put on the helmet of salvation.

It means that I, a child of God destined for glory, will let that hope of eternal salvation guide my thoughts every day. Because in the words of Brian Tracy, you're always moving in the direction of your most dominant thoughts.

It's kind of like when you know that you have a big vacation coming up. Let's say that you're going to go to Florida for eight days. You're going to fly out on a Friday afternoon. You're off work on Friday.

So you kind of took that Friday and all the next week. You got a beach house rented. You can't wait for this. It can't come soon enough. But you still got four work days to get through before you're free chilling like a villain.

[16:38] Okay? And so as those days trudge by, and that's exactly what they do when you're in such a hurry to get to the beach, one day old Donna full of drama comes in and she tries to drag you into another fight in the office because that's what she does.

But listen, homie ain't playing that game. My eyes are on the prize. When rebellious Ronnie tries to cause a mutiny in the office because he don't know how to submit to the authority, we're like, get behind me Satan.

I don't care who's in charge when I get back. I am focused on my job and getting to Friday and then hasta la vista, baby. And what a difference. Man, what a difference it makes when you live in light of eternity.

When your eyes are on the prize and you have the joy of heaven filling your soul. Write down this word hope. H-O-P-E. Hope. The very thing every person searches for whether they realize it or not, whether they search in the right places or not.

Because church, when you know who you are because of whose you are and even where you will land when it all shakes out, you can tackle each day with true hope in your mind.

[17:47] You can approach the hardships of life with the hope of eternal glory. And that will change everything about how you think. And how you think will change everything about how you respond.

And how you respond will change everything about the impact that you're going to make in this world for Jesus. And if you're like me, right now I'm thinking, man, I got some growing to do. I'm not there yet, but Lord, help me to grow in this area. So for the rest of our time, I just want to share a truth statement with you. And we're going to break it down into two chunks or two pieces here.

But here's the first part. Take every thought captive. I want to read the passage that this comes from. But before I do, I want you to get a word picture in your mind, okay?

So kind of, if you're able, if you're not driving or something, close your eyes and just picture what comes to your mind when you think of taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

[18:50] Just let whatever image come to your mind, okay? Now look with me here at 2 Corinthians 10. Let's start in verse 4. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

On the contrary, they have the divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. Now listen to this. And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Now go back to that mental picture in your mind of what it looks like to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. Here's where my mind goes. I picture a jail cell.

And in that cold cell surrounded by dreary walls and inescapable bars, I see the words insecurity, worthlessness that so many people feel about themselves.

down deep. I see the words anger, resentment, revenge, jealousy, even hatred that build up inside of many of us. I see lust and gossip, doubt and fear, loneliness and laziness.

[19:56] I see materialism and control, pride and selfishness. Guys, we can keep going, but remember like Romans 8 teaches, we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus, through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world, right? And that's what the Holy Spirit is speaking through Paul. These thoughts that become actions, that become strongholds, that control you and keep you from walking in victory, they don't have to hold you prisoner any longer.

You are not defined by these things because you are not these things. Strongholds are demolished under the divine lordship of Jesus Christ. And if you, if you belong to him, you are royalty because you're a child of the King of Kings.

And if you're not his yet, man, I'd be running to the cross today to discover hope and forgiveness in his loving and gracious arms. But what happens when we let our guard down and that sneaky enemy brings these ungodly thoughts back into our minds?

Well, we do what we did at first. We lock them back up. We protect our minds with that helmet of salvation. We stop watching and scrolling through filth that wants to take us captive.

[21:11] We stop comparing ourselves to others and what they have because they're probably up to their eyeballs in debt. We stop surrounding ourselves with people who speak defeat over our life.

And we take every thought captive and we run this victorious race knowing the finish line is heaven. Now let's finish that sentence. So we take every thought captive by renewing our minds in truth. Have you noticed a theme yet in this series? Every piece of armor, every one so far has brought us back to the truth of God's word.

And then next week, the last piece of armor, the sword, is all about the word of God. But if we're going to think like a true soldier for Christ, we have to renew our minds daily.

And how do you do that? You do it with truth. Listen to how Romans 12, verse 2 puts this. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

[22:13] Then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing, and perfect will. See, it can't stop with taking every thought captive. We have to keep going by replacing it, by renewing our minds daily in truth, because truth transforms.

Truth changes us. Let me ask you, do you live as a prisoner of wrong thinking? I think our natural reaction to the preacher real fast is to be like, no, I don't.

How about you? But I think if we're honest, I think we all probably do to some degree, right? I mean, we all do. We all have wrong thinking that flows through our head. The first step is to realize that, and then by the power of the Holy Spirit living inside of you, you take those thoughts captive and you replace them with truth.

You let truth put them in that jail cell. You let truth vanish, demolish those strongholds. Listen, I know this isn't a fun journey, but let's go back to that cold, dreary jail cell again.

Every single one of us has struggled with feelings of insecurity and worthlessness, like we're not good enough, like we don't measure up. But what does truth say? You are fearfully and wonderfully made by your creator.

[23:32] You are a citizen of heaven. You have a purpose in this world to shine for Christ. Yes, you matter to the God of the universe. So who cares what anybody else says? We've all had feelings also of anger and resentment, revenge, hatred, jealousy.

And yet truth teaches us that we'll never forgive anyone else more than God has already forgiven us. We stand here as recipients of the most amazing love the world has ever known. How can we be okay with hatred?

And then lust and gossip. Truth teaches that that other person is made in the image of God. So they deserve my respect. They deserve my purity.

And then doubt and fear. Truth says that you're not given a spirit of fear and timidity. And guys, we could keep going, but it's amazing what happens when truth starts to daily immerse our minds. It begins this process of transforming us more and more into the image of Christ. But let's be real. Sometimes the process is painful. Many times, you and I will fall short.

[24 : 37] We will need to fall on our knees and repent before a throne of grace. And yet daily, we are growing, we are maturing, we are transforming from the patterns of this world to holiness in Christ.

But I think any of us who've walked with Jesus for years, I think we would say, although the process can be painful and not always so comfortable, I think we would say, wow, it is so worth it.

There was a dad and his six-year-old daughter laying under the stars. The dad was pointing out a few stars to her and then they were even taking their fingers and acting like they were tracing along the constellations.

And that's when the little girl said, you know, daddy, if the bottom side of heaven is this beautiful, just think how wonderful the top side must be. You know, I'm so glad that we can know where we will spend eternity because we know the one who holds the future.

I'm grateful that I can wake up every day. I don't always do it, but I can and I should. I can wake up every day and I can put on that helmet of salvation. I can put on the hope that I have in Christ for eternal glory.

[25 : 44] And I'm thankful that I don't have to be paralyzed in wrong thinking. I don't have to be controlled by the enemy's lies. I can take every thought captive by renewing my mind in truth every day.

So what we're saying is, you and I, we can think like a soldier. Go ahead and pray with me.

Heavenly Father, thank you so much for just how you have spoken this truth into our hearts.

Thank you for how good you are. Thank you that you care about our minds and what infiltrates our minds and what gets to live in our minds and you are calling us to purity of mind.

So Father, we just give you permission right now. Have your way in us. Deal with these hearts. If we're looking at filth and our minds are just immersed in filth, will you just convict our spirit right now just to lay that down and to follow you faithfully, to get rid of those things, to demolish those strongholds and walk in right thinking, to put on that helmet of salvation that is going to protect our mind from the blows that Satan would love to throw our way.

So Father, we just give you permission. Take our hearts. Make us more and more into the image of Jesus. That is our heart's desire. We pray all of this in your precious name, Jesus.

[27 : 16] God's people said, right where you are, amen and amen. Hey, let me give you a quick invitation. Maybe you have some faith questions. Maybe you have some questions about the church.

Maybe you'd like to talk about what it looks like to give your life to Jesus. We would love, once again, we are First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. My name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor here.

We would love to come alongside you just like people have done for us. We are called to be a community of believers. So if that's you and you have questions or you just want to work through things or you want to talk about giving your life to Jesus, here's a couple ways you can reach out. You can go to email and you can email me at ray at FCCGreensburg.com. That's ray at FCCGreensburg.com.

Or you can call us in the church office, 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488. Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today.

[28 : 18] God bless you and have a great week. But make sure you put on that helmet of salvation.