

The Armor of God

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[0:00] Father, I ask that you would send your spirit that we might hear your word. I ask that you would deal with the weaknesses and sins of this preacher, I That they would not be a distraction.

I ask that you pray that what is heard today and what is taken into our hearts would glorify and honor your son, Jesus Christ. It's in his name we pray. Amen. You may be seated.

Amen. Reading from Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6.

If you want to turn there, that's where we'll be spending most of our time this morning. Verse 10.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you might 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.

[1:14] 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. 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, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak.

How many of us have heard of the Battle of Teutoburg? Anybody?

[2:38] Really? I see one, and I think that was from her extended experience as a teacher. I think that's what keeps it in mind. Some historians say that this is the most important battle that has taken place so far in the history of the Western world.

I don't think so. I haven't ranked it in my rank. It probably makes my top five. I think it's probably more significant than even battles that are in our recent memory, like the Battle of the Bulge.

It's the battle that basically ensured that we speak English today. And it also protected the German language. If this battle hadn't gone down, we'd probably all be speaking Latin today.

Now, that's either a good thing or a bad thing. I think that Latin is actually a more beautiful language and more accurate. But the Battle of Teutoburg is what kept that from happening, because it's what stopped Rome from expanding north.

Something unspeakable happened that day. The invincible Roman legions were wiped out. Not just one legion, but three legions.

[3:56] The 17th, the 18th, and the 19th legion. Once they were destroyed, their numbers were retired, just like a Pro Bowl player today in the NFL.

In order to understand what happened, you have to understand what the strength of the Roman legion was. It was a particular formation called a manipule.

And this manipule was invincible during its time. It was made up of three lines. The Hestadi, the Princeps, and the Triari.

Basically, what happened was three lines of soldiers would line up. They'd put their youngest men on the front line. They would put their most experienced warriors in the second line.

And they would put the older warriors in the back line. And as they approached the enemy or the enemy approached them, the youngest on the front line would pour their strength into battle.

[5:01] And when one of them stumbled or that front line became tired, the commander would issue a command, and suddenly those who were in the middle would take the place of those that

were in the front, and they would continue on.

So basically, when you face this formation, you're facing a line that would continually replenish itself where the freshest warriors were always on the front.

Not only that, those on the front line would protect those in the back from damage from the enemy. The Roman general Varus, who had commanded the 17th and 18th legions, made a fatal error. His enemy, the leader of a tribe of Germans, whose name is Arminius, and whose nickname is, and I'm not making this up, is Herman the German.

I don't know. That's not what I gave to him. That's what historians have named. Herman the German sent a spy in to become Varus' second in command or his helper.

[6:23] Somebody that flattered Varus, who deceived him, and convinced him that it was a wise thing to make a march to the force of Tudorberg.

The problem with this is that the terrain that was being marched through was not suited for this formation I just spoke of, the manifold.

The second problem is Varus was a lazy general. He didn't have his men march in formation. This manifold was not able to form.

He let them march with the gaps in the line. And as he marched through the forest of Tudorberg, they marched into Herman the German's ambush.

He had dug up earthworks and hid behind him. And these unorganized Germanic tribes did what no other fighting force had been able to do. They jumped up, and while the men were disorganized, not in their formation, they threw within five minutes what people estimated to be up to 25,000 spears.

[7:34] And even though it took three days for the battle to end, effectively, the entire legions were defeated within the matter of five minutes. All because the leader, the general, did not have his troops in formation.

It was unheard of that a legion would be defeated by anybody, not to mention these tribes of barbarians. Why mention all of this?

Well, many of us have heard a lot of sermons about the armor of God. We've sat through a lot of Sunday school lessons. We've seen a lot of kids' coloring sheets that look at the whole armor of God.

But I believe that when we look at this passage, we unfortunately bring too much of the philosophy of our age into our consideration. Have you noticed that we live in a me-first society focused on the performance of individuals?

Yes. When we come to passages like this, we look for what it means to us as individuals. I've been working, I've had this meditation, actually it's been going about for four years now, where I've been thinking a lot of when I read through the epistles, what I look for is what does it mean for me?

[9:07] When these epistles were written to churches, they were written to church bodies. Most of these things that we're called to obedience for, we require the church in order to walk with it.

If you go home yesterday, I was Googling images for the whole armor of God. I did the little Google search, whole armor of God, then hit the images. I went through, just went through the quick scroll, scroll, scroll.

I went through maybe five scrolls up, so it's got to be three, 350 images. You've got the coloring sheets, you've got the pictures. Anytime you look at these things, it's always one person standing by himself.

Many times you see nonsense, like the whole armor of God being a medieval knight in a suit of armor. Now, it is impossible for me to tell if Paul specifically had the Battle of Tudorberg in mind when he wrote this text.

The fact is, this battle happened when Jesus was around five years old. It means Paul was either a teenager or a very young man. This event was in the mind of the society that this epistle was written to.

[10:29] It's hard for me to imagine that with an event this significant, being so prominent at the time of this writing, that this thought didn't cross his mind. Paul was a young man when the legions were defeated.

And every culture since the beginning of time has used combat play to instruct its youth especially its young men. For some, maybe it was cops and robbers, maybe it was cowboys and Indians. When I grew up, it was G.I. Joe's. Everybody remember G.I. Joe's? So that's all I played with. That's all that captured my mind.

G.I. Joe's had rifles that shot laser beams. That's just stupid. But if you look at the news today, you see a lot of men my age that have problems relating to the realities of what it means to be in the armed force.

I'm going to throw out that that's possibly because they were raised thinking that rifles shot laser beams. Paul definitely has the Roman army in mind when he's writing Ephesians 6 as an example, as a spiritual lesson for them.

[11:54] His audience would have thought of the Roman legion and they never would have thought about fighting as an individual. They would have not thought about American G.I.s.

They would not have thought about medieval knights. They would not have thought about Jedi's. They would not have thought about rifles that shot laser beams. They would have not thought about whatever nonsense we use to project this image of us standing brave and separate fighting with the whole armor of God.

They would have thought about the reality of what it meant to fight together as a legion. And they would have remembered that the legions won or lost based on their unity and based on how tightly they stood together.

Let's look at chapter 6. Let's look at the text. The success of the battle is not determined by the condition of the world around us.

Consider verse 12. The success of our battle is found in the health of our formation. We are called to stand firm, having done all to prepare ourselves for the evil day.

[13:10] Can't you just see in this verse the legion three lines deep resisting the enemy?

Remember what Jesus said, this is my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

This seems counterintuitive to us in America in the year 2017. But our command is not to achieve victory. The victory is not ours.

It belongs to Jesus and will be achieved on that day when every knee will bow and call him Lord. Our call instead is to avoid defeat.

Our call is to join that body which God has ordained. The armor he has given us will not work if we are not joined together in the church, Jesus' body, by the Holy Spirit.

The flaming darts of the evil one, just like the spears of Hermann the German, surround us. And if we break ourselves away from that formation, the church which God has called us to will fall just like the Roman legions did in the forest of Tutenberg.

[14:26] I've seen this idea play out in my own life and I see it spreading through America and fortunately through the church as well as those outside the church.

This idea that spirituality is a personal proposition, that we don't need to be part of a church to be close to God. That the measure of our greatness is somehow shown in our own stoic resolve or personal performance.

I'm sorry to tell you this, but I'm not great and you're not great and the enemy of our souls knows this. He will pull us out of our formation where we are vulnerable to his devices.

We are all guaranteed to stumble on the front line. Think of those battles we see in the Christian life. And here's just a few of them, by no means an exhaustive list.

Parenting, personal prayer, our thought life, our marriages, our career. We are all going to fail at these one time in our life.

[15:34] It is a guarantee. None of us will perform perfectly. I think of parenting was the example that came to my mind yesterday as I was considering it.

Anybody who is a parent, tell me that there's not one day you don't wake up scared to death of what faces you to come. To convince that your parenting style is going to screw up your child irreparably for the rest of their life.

I cannot count the times that I personally have stumbled on the front line as a father and have had to turn back to be supported by an older Christian soldier who stood behind me and helped me get back up on my feet.

This is why Paul, in Ephesians chapter 5, the chapter that precedes this, tells us to submit to one another. Jesus has placed us in his army, in his formation, so that we can stand together in mutual defense, looking out for the needs of each other.

Too many times we treat the church as a religious nicety, something for the kids or just a part of our social life. We treat our attendance as an obligation.

[17:07] Maybe we think that the rector should just be happy that we came out this week. Once we attend, our obligation is finished. We forget that our placement is in the body of Christ.

It is vital for our very survival. When you are absent from the body, you do not just harm yourself. You harm those who you're not there to protect. You make the entire formation vulnerable. So have you think of this.

Have you ever heard of an army that fought well by doing battle just on Sunday morning? Our enemy never rests, neither can we.

We must stand together as a church on a daily base. We don't take time off from the battle. For this reason, the author of Hebrews writes, Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

[18:22] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Elsewhere, he writes, Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

And, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.

And all the more as you see the day drying near. You see the same idea of coming together and holding each other up. Recognizing that we all have weaknesses and will stumble and we rely on each other to get through that.

The church stands to protect the trust that has been given us until the day Christ returns. And he, not us, will earn the victory when he casts Satan and his demonic world system into the fires of hell.

[19:42] Our mission of evangelism is not an attempt to conquer the world, but rather a mission to find reinforcements to support our ranks as we continue our march that began on the day of Pentecost into the future.

Now, what is this armor we have been provided? We see in our passage the breastplate of righteousness, shoes, which are the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit.

I've seen whole sermon series done on these, which examine the piece one by one. We don't have time for that today.

We're not going to look at each piece individually. To say, where do these come from? What are they? I'd like to point your attention to something that's very interesting. In Isaiah's prophecies, considering the coming of the promised Messiah, Jesus, there's two very interesting passages where Isaiah almost exactly merits this passage.

In fact, I believe this is what Paul has in mind as he's writing Ephesians 6, the prophecy of Isaiah. In Isaiah chapter 11, the prophet writes, There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit, and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.

[21:32] He shall not judge by what his eyes see or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

We see here our Savior Jesus portrayed as the warrior king who fights on behalf of his people from within the midst of his people. In Isaiah chapter 59, the prophet writes, 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 him 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.

[22:49] According to their deeds, so you will repay. Wrath to his adversaries or payment to his enemies. To the coastlands, you will render repayment. So they shall fear the name of the Lord from the west and his glory from the rising of the sun.

For he will come like a rushing stream, which the wind of the Lord drives. The whole armor of God is a reflection of the qualities of Christ that are made available by God to every baptized believer.

For this reason, Paul writes in Galatians, For as many of you as were baptized in Christ have put on Christ.

He is the one that fights the battle for us, provided we stand together in his formation. And this does not bring glory to our names, but it does bring glory to him.

Amen. In closing, this brings to mind the encouragement Moses gave the nation Israel as the Pharaoh's chariots were descending with the purpose of wiping God's covenant people off of the pages of history.

[24 : 11] I don't know if in the history of man there's been a more vulnerable group than that small nation who stood without any material armor with an ocean behind them and an entire nation rushing towards them equipped to kill them down to the last child.

Moses said to his people under his care, Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord. which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be silent.

Let's pray. Lord God almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day. Preserve us with your mighty power that we may not fall into sin.

Nor be overcome by adversity. And in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

[25 : 29] Amen. Thank you.