

Armour Of God

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[0 : 0 0] 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.

Let me once again say, because I'm very conscious of the kind of world we live in, in the 21st century Western world, where the idea of the holy war evokes all kinds of negative and frightening thoughts.

[1 : 1 1] And let me say, this has nothing to do with jihad. It's got nothing to do with any kind of physical violence. The Christian faith has nothing whatsoever to do with violence between one person and another.

And whatever the history of the Christian faith is, you will find in the New Testament, the gospel is the gospel of peace. And men and women are not coerced or forced into believing Jesus Christ.

They are persuaded by God's Holy Spirit to willingly embrace Jesus Christ. Not one person is here tonight who's a Christian who hasn't decided to be a Christian.

That is because God has opened up that person's heart, and he has impressed upon that person the truth of his word and the truth of Jesus Christ. And that person has willingly run to Jesus.

Every one of us tonight, if we're a believer in Jesus Christ, we have come to Jesus, and we have taken hold of him by faith, because his spirit has worked in us.

[2 : 1 2] It is not because anyone has coerced us into so doing so. When we're talking about the armor of God, it has nothing to do with the kind of holy war that we hear about so many times on our news.

Now, we began last week by looking at the armor of God, by having a look at the belt of truth. We saw last week that the belt of truth was the foundational element in the armor of God.

We wrestle not against flesh and blood, says Paul. We wrestle against an unseen, invisible enemy, and yet an enemy nonetheless, real and present, a clear and present danger.

That's what we need to remember. The enemy is a clear and present danger. And the first element in that armor is the belt of truth. The belt of truth.

And we saw how important the foundation of truth was, and how truth opened up for us what truth is as a foundation. We said it was four R's.

[3 : 15] First of all, truth was reality. The Bible tells us that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the heavens also, they give up their own reality, and that's for us to discover what the reality of the world and the universe is, by science and discovery and analysis and investigation and research, and thousands of years into the human race.

And we know so much, and the more we know, the more we want to know. Why? Because truth is there to be discovered. And there's something within the human mind that wants to discover more and more of that truth.

And remember how we said, all truth is God's truth. And therefore, all truth is good. And the more we can discover about the world around us, then the more we ought to be on our knees praising and thanking God.

Instead of that, what we do is the same as what the men and women did in the very beginning, did when they built the Tower of Babel. They reckoned that because they were growing in their knowledge, that this meant that they could reach the heavens itself, and that they could reach God, and they could be gods.

And that's, of course, what mankind has been doing ever since, and no less, today in today's world. We also saw that truth was revelation. The heavens declare the glory of God.

[4 : 34] And not just the heavens, not just creation. We also saw that the Bible itself is God's revelation that makes known to us, as we saw this morning, who God is and what God is like.

That God is Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit. How do we know that? Because God has told us. How do we know who Jesus Christ was? Because God has told us. How do we know how to be saved tonight?

Because God has told us. We depend upon his revelation of himself in order to know who he is. Thirdly, we saw that truth was redemption.

The truth of God is Jesus coming into the world, because he so loved the world and gave himself on the cross, laid down his life as the sacrifice for our sins, so that we could be saved by coming to him in faith.

That's what redemption means. Redemption means God purchasing us by his own blood. How do we know that? Because he's told us, go to the cross. There you say, when I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died.

[5 : 39] That's what we say. That's God's revelation and God's redemption. The truth of God. And lastly, we saw that truth was regulation. Having come to discover the truth, how ought we to live?

We live as men and women and boys and girls of truth. Truth is the governing factor, the governing principle in our lives. And it's as we live out the truth in our lives that people see the reality of the Christian faith in us.

So we saw these four things then that truth meant, and four things that I hope were relevant to the belt of truth. And now on top of that, Paul tells us to put on the breastplate of righteousness.

I want to look at three elements in the armour this week, and another three elements next week, or at least the other two, and then Paul's reference to prayer. And we'll see how we get on.

Having fastened the belt of truth, put on the breastplate of righteousness. And the second of these, or rather the third of the elements, the breastplate of righteousness, is the shoes for the feet.

[6 : 46] What does it mean to have the shoes in readiness, and then in all circumstances taking up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one?

Now I want you, before we even go into that, to look at the key words in this passage. What are the key words in this passage? Let's look at them through. Let's list them. Truth. Righteousness.

Gospel. Peace. Faith. The sword of the Spirit. Where do all of these key words take us? They take us to Jesus Christ.

And there's a sense, of course, in which you can't go beyond Jesus Christ. If you're asking the question, where is this armour of God? Where can I put it on? Where can I find it?

Well, you find it in Jesus Christ. He is the armour of God. And it is as we live in relationship to him that we are fit. What did he say to his disciples?

[7 : 42] He said, Abide in me and I will abide in you and you shall bear much fruit. That's the mark of the Christian. That's what makes the difference between the person who is a true believer and the person who only has a false connection with Jesus.

Remember John chapter 15, where he's describing the difference between those who have a false connection, an outward connection alone with Jesus, and an inward living vital connection with Jesus.

He says, Abide with me. Abide in me. Not with me. In me. And so it's only as we abide in a relationship to Jesus Christ that we can truly say that we have the armour of God on.

Let's look at the first then of these, or rather the second, we looked at the belt of truth. Let's look at the second of these elements, which is the breastplate of righteousness. Remembering all the time that we can't pick and choose which ones we're going to have on.

Every one of them was connected in some way. You had, in order to be completely ready for the war against the enemy, you had to have every element fitted. Now the breastplate of righteousness was fitted to the belt.

[8 : 53] You remember how I said last week that the belt was a wide leather contraption that went all around your lower body. And it wasn't just a little thing like we have for, it wasn't a fashion accessory like we wear belts, but it was a wide protective band that went all the way around the lower half of your body.

And connected to this was the breastplate of righteousness. And just as it sounds, it protected the upper part of your body, all the way from your neck, all the way down to where the belt was.

It was made apparently out of tough leather. And it gave protection against somebody who was trying to... And by the way, I hate to go against years of assumption or years of having read John Bunyan.

I love the Pilgrim's Progress as much as anyone else, but apparently they tell me that the breastplate of righteousness did actually go all the way around the back.

John Bunyan, remember that chapter in which the Christian fights with Apollyon, he makes the point that on no account must he ever turn his back to the enemy.

[10 : 07] And apparently there was the idea somehow that the breastplate didn't extend to your back. Well, apparently they tell me that, the experts tell me that it did extend all the way around to the back.

I don't know, again, I don't want to disappoint anybody, but that's what the experts say. In any case, it was to protect the entire upper part of the body.

Now, what's the key word? The key word is righteousness. What does righteousness mean? Let me tell you first and foremost that righteousness is the most important word in the Bible, as far as our standing before God is concerned.

If you don't know tonight what righteousness is, make sure you do by the time you leave this building. It's as important as that.

It's what God looks for in every single human being. It's what God has made us to be.

[11 : 25] God doesn't look for success in any one of us tonight. He doesn't look for the kind of things that we regard as being enviable, good looks, good business head, riches, power, intelligence, academic success, strength.

He doesn't look for any of that. That's what we look for in our celebrities. God has no interest in these things. God is concerned for one thing alone.

And that is righteousness. And righteousness means a right standing before God. That's what it means. It means a person, let's say there was such a thing as a righteous person in the world.

What would that person be like? It would be a person who 24-7 in thought, word, and deed corresponded in every possible way to what God wanted.

In thought, there wouldn't be a single moment in that person's life when he lived or when he thought or when he did anything else that was outside of God's will and God's word.

[12 : 50] In other words, a person who is totally obedient. Not in some kind of slavish way because God's first commandment is you shall love the Lord with all your heart. So the first thing about a righteous person is a person who loves God with all his heart and mind and soul and strength.

But then that person goes on to live a perfect life in every possible way conforming to what God commands. And you and I both know that such a person simply doesn't exist and hasn't existed ever since our first parents Adam and Eve rebelled in the Garden of Eden.

That person simply doesn't exist. The best person in the world falls way short of what God commands. That means that try as he might that person is not a righteous person.

You can't get a 90% righteous person. You're either righteous or you're not. You can try the whole of your life you can make every attempt to keep the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount or whatever.

If you fall short of one in one element alone you are not a righteous person. That's what the Bible tells us. If you break one part of God's law you've broken it all.

[14 : 09] So that's what righteous that's what nevertheless God looks for that one quality in us human beings and that's what we don't have. And that's what we mean by our lostness.

Our sinfulness. Our sinfulness is not the bad things that we do first and foremost. It's what we don't do. We don't love God with all our heart and mind and soul and strength.

We come short. We're not what we should be. We've lost it with God. That's why the catechism tells us that sin when there's that great question that foundational question what is sin?

Sin is any want. It's a lacking. It's a deficiency within all of us. It's what we don't do. It's what we fail to do and we're not righteous.

So I hope I've tried to explain what righteous means. It's what we don't have and it's what it is is the standard that God requires of each one of us.

[15 : 15] Now here's what happens when a person comes to Jesus Christ. You see Jesus was what we are not. He was he had and he lived the perfect righteous life.

That's why as we said this morning God was able to say to him this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. And he's he is well pleased.

God was well pleased in his son as he lived the perfect life as one of us as a perfect human being. Now here's what happens when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

Two things happen. First of all God removes all our guilt past, present and future and he completely forgives us from all our sin.

Wipes our slate clean. Clears our record. But then he does something else. He takes Jesus' perfect goodness and righteousness and he credits that into our account.

[16 : 26] I don't know if I've used this illustration before but I've for several years now I've come to be a participator in PC banking. And PC banking is where you can sit at your own computer and you can manage all your bank accounts if you have more than one.

It depends on who you are I suppose. And you can do all kinds of things with your bank account. You put in a couple of passwords and all of a sudden your bank account comes up in front of you on the screen and you can see who's been paid and who's paid you.

You can see when your salary comes in. You can see that you can actually set up direct debits. You can set up standing orders. And you can actually take some money and pay it into someone else's account.

If you gave me your bank account number I could tonight, I could sit down at my computer and I could send money into your account and you would have it instantly just like that. I could credit money into your account.

Now here's what God has done. We're in debt. We were in debt. And God has credited Jesus' perfect righteousness into our account so that tonight if we're coming to Jesus in faith, if we're following him and believing in him and loving him as our Lord and saviour, God reckons us.

[17 : 50] This is what I meant tonight. This is what I meant this morning. When I said that a person who belonged to Jesus, God says to that person, you are my beloved son, my beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased.

Why? Because God has joined us. He has united us to Jesus Christ. And that's what righteousness is. It's very important for us to understand that because it's important for our standing.

Here's why it's important in respect of the breastplate of righteousness. Because the devil comes in, usually at times of great weakness, and he brings the past back to us.

and he'll tell you, he'll give you, it's amazing, it's amazing how the devil can improve our memory of things that we've done and how we've lived in the past.

And he can remind us of things that we've done which are atrocious and shameful and so mortifying that we're ashamed to even think of these things.

[19 : 03] When you think, perhaps some of your past life, you don't even have to go that far into the past. Things that we've said, things that we've done in our hearts, imaginations and fantasies and thoughts we've allowed to creep into our minds and into our hearts, bitternesses that we have harbored against other people, sins that we have slipped into, temptation that we have slipped into and we've ended up in situations that we felt we couldn't get out of.

And we've discovered that living for the wrong things doesn't produce the happiness and the contentment that we imagined it would do. And the devil at times brings all of that back to you.

And then he questions and he says, are you absolutely sure that every single sin that you've ever been committed has been? That's a tall order. He'll tell you that, well, there are some sins that are common to the whole of the human race and well, God has forgiven those sins, but your sin is different.

You're on your own. You've done things and when you think about it, nobody else could have done what you did. You are quite unique. You're much worse than anyone else has done.

You're a hypocrite. You look at that other Christian in church and there's no way he would have ever done what you did. And you think that you're a Christian.

[20 : 26] You call yourself a Christian. You think you can sit beside that person in church and sing the same psalms. The angel of the Lord encamps and round encompasses. How dare you sing these things? Only those who are truly righteous can sing that and everybody else is right.

You're not. You have no concept of what righteousness is because of the kind of life that you've lived in the past. You don't need to go too far into the past.

It could be even last week. Where perhaps you've slipped and you found yourself doing things that you never imagined that you would do and you've allowed yourself to fall into temptation that has brought shame on yourself and it's brought an obstacle.

That's what happens when we backslide. We create an obstacle between ourselves and the Lord in which we're so full of shame we feel we can't approach God because of what he knows about us.

It's like David how long he left it since he committed a adultery with Bathsheba until he finally when God in his mercy confronted him with what he had done he finally went to God and said have mercy on me O God according to your loving kindness.

[21 : 40] And there are times like that in the Christian life where the devil comes in and he says you can't be a Christian and it's at that time we need the breastplate of righteousness to say to him there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus whatever I have done and you can confess what you like to the devil he knows what you've done but that's not the point what's important is what you confess to the Lord the devil can't do a thing for you except accuse you and slander you and discourage you and keep you back you see what happens is when you become so conscious of your own weakness and backsliding as a Christian you end up if you listen to the wrong voice you end up going in the wrong direction instead of running back to Jesus for his forgiveness which he is willing to give you more willing than you are to ask you end up going down the wrong road you end up running away from God and that's why when the enemy gets in and things get worse and worse and worse and we become weaker and weaker and weaker and we become more and more discouraged don't let him do that breastplate of righteousness

God has paid Christ's perfect righteousness into your account and nothing can change that it's there that's your standing in front of God why what right do I have to come to pray tonight I only have one thing that gives me the right to pray and that is the righteousness of Jesus Christ and that's why I can be absolutely sure whatever I confess to God that God will hear me and he will answer my prayer and he will accept me because of my righteousness in Jesus Christ it's not a righteousness I've earned it's one that has been paid into my account so that tonight I am in credit I am righteous I can say because God says it I am righteous with the righteousness of Jesus Christ can you say that tonight do you have confidence before

God this evening I hope you do if you're a believer you can come boldly as the apostle tells us come boldly into the most holy place why because we have a great high priest and you have to be very very careful of what the enemy will say to you and how you respond to that the breastplate of righteousness let's go on to the shoes the shoes that the apostle tells us the shoes in verse 15 for your feet having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace what do they mean well apparently the shoes again we use shoes as fashion items don't we we get all kinds of shapes and sizes there was only one shape and size as far as the Roman soldier was concerned he didn't care about what he looked like he only cared about the protection that his shoes would give him and it was absolutely vital for two reasons first of all he was on the move and then in times of war he had to stand sometimes the ground would have been slippery because it was raining an appropriate suitable footwear had to be worn just the same way if you go up a mountain if you go up if you go up any mountain the cliché or anything else you have to wear you're told to wear appropriate footwear why because you could go down a hole you could break your ankle you could slip and you could fall you could do yourself a huge injury why because you haven't got the right footwear on there's two reasons why why the

Roman soldier had to wear the right kind of shoes quite apart from protecting his feet he had to stand he had to stand immovable when he was fighting hand to hand combat with an enemy soldier it's the same thing with us as well we have to stand again going back to the pilgrim's progress I intend to read the part it's such a fascinating encounter maybe read it next week or read some of it anyway where Christian contends with Apollyon in hand to hand combat it was when Christian fell to the ground that he became most vulnerable and where the enemy almost killed him almost of course we know that he didn't come to that because he was given help at the right moment but so the shoes it gave you standing power and it gave you marching power and the standing power is important to hold on to stay where you are to keep trusting in

Jesus to lay hold upon God's message of salvation and not let it go and to refuse to listen to the wrong voices and to refuse to slip you know the Christian life comes down to sheer dogged determination doesn't it sometimes you don't feel very determined and sometimes you don't feel very strong you know a Christian is at his strongest very often when he's at his weakness why because God's strength is made perfect in your weakness he takes our weakness and he converts it into his strength I don't know how that works don't ask me how it works but I know it to be a reality in my own life and I know I'm sure you'll agree with me that God's strength is made perfect in our weakness but the shoes were also for marching on because God has a purpose he's not just standing there waiting we're not just to stand there and wait to be attacked or to be confronted by our enemy we have a purpose and a job to do as a church we have a gospel to proclaim there's a message to go all over the world and you know one of the strongest defenses against the success of enemy attack is our involvement in the

[28 : 07] Lord's army by the way I'm not talking in any sense once again of a holy war or a jihad I'm simply talking about the work of the gospel and spreading the gospel all over the world you know you could do a tremendous amount for your own protection by being involved in the work of the gospel either at home here or by being involved in mission work wherever it goes all over the world there is nothing more vulnerable than an idle Christian the devil finds work for idle hands and if you're sitting around waiting then that's the kind of person who's most vulnerable the person who is involved in the work of the gospel has no time to fall into temptation he's got no time to listen to the kind of accusations that the devil brings levels against us because he's so concerned with the spread of the gospel what involved can I ask you this question what involvement do you have tonight in the work

I'm not saying you should be involved in everything you know some people try to be involved in everything and that's not very productive because you can end up trying to be so involved you can have a finger in every pie and then you end up not doing any good to anybody but everyone can have an involvement in something some element of the work of the gospel either here in our congregation and whatever congregation you come from or in the work of missions both home and abroad how much do you know about what our church is doing both at home and abroad it may not be our church it may be some other missionary organisation it may be some missionary that you write to and you want to know how they're getting on and you want to take an active interest not just to we pray for missionaries well that's all very well but how active is your interest the shoes were for marching on and being involved in the purpose of the army which was on the move the church is on the move

God's purposes are to extend his kingdom and one day the earth will be filled with the glory of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea this is a worldwide movement and each one of us should be involved in that movement lastly the shield of faith lastly tonight anyway the shield of faith the shield was about that size it was about four three four feet and about one and a half feet wide and it was made of two apparently they put two pieces of wood together and they covered it with thick leather and the interesting thing here is that the purpose of the shield is given partly there were two types of shield I remember once I'm going to go on a few minutes it doesn't matter I remember visiting a few years ago being in holiday down in the south of England and we went to Warwick Castle and it was the most fascinating experience because it was a lovely day and outside there was this guy who was giving a demonstration of how medieval soldiers would fight so he had bows and arrows and he had swords and he had shields and all the rest of it it was absolutely fascinating and one of the things he was showing us was the difference between one type of shield and another and he was telling us that there's two different types of shield one was the large shield which we're talking about here but the other one was the buckler you know

I say this to my shame I had never knew what a buckler was until that day it wasn't that long ago I'd read it often enough even the bible the bible talks about god being a shield and a buckler I didn't even know what buckler was a buckler is a small shield just a little one that you wore and it went and it was to protect your wrist and it was to use in hand-to-hand combat as a buckler it's just a small shield to prevent the soldier who you were fighting with being able to attack your arm and you were able to use that as a kind of a weapon as well but this is not a buckler this is a bigger shield and the idea was that in a battle the first thing that the enemy army would do would be to dip their arrows in bitumen or in tar and set them alight and they would in their hundreds they would fire these arrows into the air so there was this flood of fiery fiery arrows coming all the way and they were landing and you had to watch where these were coming from alternatively as you were on the march you had to keep your eye out all the time because anyone at any time you didn't know where the arrow was coming from you didn't know when it was going to come but you had to be ready and you had to watch for them coming so you had to raise your shield and if you didn't raise your shield that's what it means by take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of or the arrows of the evil one the idea of course is that at any moment in time there is never a single moment when we're absolutely safe from what our enemy might want to do for us to do to us we're never safe at any one single moment and at any moment all of a sudden you could find yourself in a situation you're thinking how did I get myself into this situation where did this come from here I am five minutes ago I felt

I was strong I felt I was immovable I was impregnable and now all of a sudden this attack has come what is this got to do with faith well I believe that Paul's talking about a particular kind of attack for which faith is the only solution it's the kind of attack in which all of a sudden you're tempted to doubt how God has revealed himself to us in the Bible let me give you an example of that this morning we were talking about the Trinity I was saying about the Father the Son and the Spirit that's how God reveals how do we know that God is Father Son and Spirit how do we know that we haven't discovered it for ourselves we haven't investigated it and deduced it we know it because of what we read in the Bible it's how God has revealed himself to us in the Bible and there is no other way of knowing it but what we read in the

[35 : 10] Bible that is what faith is taking God at his word now if you were here this morning and if you were listening to me talking about the Father the Son and the Spirit and if you were tempted to think it is so absurd this whole thing about God being Father Son and Spirit is so absurd I can understand that there being there is a supreme being someone who is higher and more knowledgeable and someone who is above the earth and the universe yes I can understand that there is something but when it comes to Father Son and Spirit there is something within our sinful minds that says I can't accept that and you know it gets worse when those tempting thoughts come to you as a Christian perhaps that was what you were thinking this morning or perhaps you were tempted to think that way

I have I've often been thought that way I've often read my Bible and all of a sudden a thought comes in you can't believe that you don't understand it it's so absurd the Son of God coming into the world God coming into the world as a baby God becoming a human God feeling pain God being mocked God dying on a cross it is absurd it makes no sense it makes no logical sense whatsoever why do you believe it why do I believe it tonight because I simply take God at his word it comes down to that there's no other way in which I can know and I can be sure that the God who I worship and the God who I serve is who he says he is faith and faith alone when I read it

I believe it because very often in my life I'll stop with this very often I've come to the point where there's either two there's one alternative another another there cannot be middle ground either the whole of this is a piece of nonsense either everything I read here about father son and spirit God coming into the world the incarnation Jesus the son of God the cross the resurrection either it is just complete nonsense it's a fabrication it's fantasy in which case the whole thing is completely futile throw it away or the whole thing is true and that's it do you believe this book to be

God's word tonight it's only by faith that we believe it and it's only as we read God's word you can't prove the trinity you can't prove the deity of Christ there's so many evidences I know but ultimately the question about whether you believe and surrender your life to him is faith and faith alone in what he has told us about himself for me I can do no other I believe I'm not saying my faith is perfect there are often times when I say like the man who said to Jesus Lord I believe help my unbelief maybe that's what you're saying tonight Lord I believe but there are so many questions there are so many doubts so many issues but that's faith faith is what lays hold upon

Jesus because you know if this book is nonsense we have nothing in all the world and that's the choice the shield of faith let's pray our father in heaven we ask now once again that you will create within us that faith and strengthen our faith that lays hold upon your word and your word alone we give thanks for the power of the gospel and for the power of the bible we thank you lord for its perfection for its infallibility that we can have every confidence in it and we ask lord that you will give us as we go out into a world full of conflict and full of question and doubt and we know that our enemy will go around seeking to destroy us seeking to bring us down in whatever way he can make us ready for him we pray lord we pray that your word will take the central place in our lives we pray that you will give us to be fitted with the belt of truth and the breast plate of righteousness the shield of faith and our feet fitted with that readiness to be involved and readiness to stand when the day comes lord be with us we pray and forgive our sin in jesus name amen psalm number 89 in the traditional version of the psalms page 345 psalm number 89 and verse 15 we'll sing to the tune newington we're going to stand to sing page 345 psalm 89 and it's verse 15 oh greatly blessed the people are the joyful sound that know in brightness of thy face oh lord they ever on shall go they in thy name shall all the day rejoice exceedingly and in thy righteousness shall they exalted be on high psalm 89 verse 15 verse 15 to verse 18 four stanzas oh greatly blessed the people are we're going to stand to sing thank you oldu■ praises to say a

[41 : 41] The people and the joyful Sabbath know how lets see the greatness of the song Oh Oh
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