

“Arm Yourself”

Ephesians 6:10-20
John 6: 56-69

David Spalding
August 22, 2021

Last week we celebrated the youth of the church on VBS Sunday. The theme of the week of Vacation Bible School was centered on what Jesus’ power does for us. There were four Biblical truths that the children learned in Vacation Bible School:

1. **Jesus’ power helps us do hard things.** This was brought to light in Philippians 4:13- “for I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength.”
2. **Jesus’ power gives us hope.** Psalm 31:24 says, “So be strong and courageous, all you who put your hope in the Lord.”
3. **Jesus’ power helps us be bold.** Isaiah 40:29 reveals, “He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless.”
4. **Jesus’ power helps us be good friends.** John 15:12 tells us to “Love each other in the same way I have loved you.”

The theme of Vacation Bible School was about POWER. Not just any power, but Jesus’ POWER to help us in our times of need. Why did we spend an entire week speaking about Jesus’ power to help us? Why didn’t we spend the week speaking of love, peace and the joyful celebration earthly bonds? The children were taught about Jesus’ POWER to help them understand where their strength comes from, if they are a believer in Christ Jesus. The need to teach our children about the power of Jesus is due to the many attacks that we face each and every day. Attacks that cause us fear.

Did you know that studies reveal that the number one fear that people have is speaking in public? The number two fear is death. Death is number two to public speaking? Jerry Seinfeld must have had it correct when he said, “to the average person, if you have to go to a funeral, you’re better off in the casket than doing the eulogy.”

What the children were taught in VBS is that there is a place we can go to find power. A power that will never let us go and will help us overcome our fears. There are reasons that we need power, even greater power than what is required to speak in public. Jesus understood this need for power and made it clear where He would turn in his time of need. When Jesus was about to be arrested, He went and prayed. He told the three disciples with him, “Pray that you will not fall into temptation.” Then Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” Jesus turned to the Father for strength and

power to complete His task. Jesus understood the forces of evil that are present on this earth and He knew that He would need strength and power to complete the task before Him.

In today's gospel reading, the disciple's fears are pretty evident. In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells his followers, made up of his disciples, "very truly I tell you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you" (John 6:53). The disciples, upon hearing this, stated, "This is hard teaching. Who can accept it?" (John 6:60). Then many of the disciples, negating the 12, "turned back and no longer followed him" (John 6:66).

Imagine the fears the disciples must have faced as they transitioned from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his death on the cross. In my mind, I can see the joyful procession and Jesus riding on a colt, a sign that the Messiah, the earthly king has arrived. I can see people running from all over the countryside towards the city. They are telling their neighbors. The men are leaving their plows in the field, the women have bread in the oven, but it is left behind. Children are gathered up and they are grabbing their cloaks to lay on the ground and finding palms to wave in jubilation...for their king has arrived.

But the week progresses, Jesus is arrested, put on trial and then they see IT. They, the followers of Jesus-- the cloak laying, palm waving, joyous shouting followers of Jesus—see: the CROSS. What do they do? They run--out of fear. Even the disciples who didn't leave when Jesus spoke of eating flesh and drinking blood--RAN. Peter denied knowing Jesus, Judas killed himself, and the remainder hid.

The cross scared the followers of Jesus and, in the years following Jesus' death and resurrection, the cross scared many people. And I still think that it scares people today. We have a hard time talking about its reality. We soften its meaning by making beautiful jewelry, mounting crosses on our walls as art, and placing cross stickers on the backs of our cars. But the reality that God could use it as a means to accomplish the gift of salvation...well, that's a scary topic. Jesus asked the direct question, "Does this offend you?" (John 6:61). The reality of the cross is the reality of what we must overcome on this earth as we approach the cross.

Although we enjoy religious freedom in America, for which I am grateful, there are so many places in this world where people have to read the Bible, worship and pray in secret. The latest actions in Afghanistan by the Taliban reveal that the dangers of following the cross are still very present today. The idea that we can worship God freely here in America is truly a gift from God. However, even

with the gift of the freedom of religion, we are faced with many battles as Christians.

In our first reading today, the Apostle Paul, brings to light this war that is waged against Christians and why we need to teach our children about the power of Jesus—like we did in VBS last week. Paul states that you will have to “stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against the flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Why do we need Jesus’ power? According to the Bible there three forces of evil that we need to fight against: The world, the flesh and the devil.

We see the world as evil in the book of James as we read, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). As we read this verse, don’t you wonder what the author of James meant when he spoke of being “a friend of this world.” He may be referring to desiring the things in this world that take us away from God. These are idols.

In 1 Peter 2, Peter speaks to the desires of the flesh as a point of evil as he states, “Dear Friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your souls” (1 Peter 2:11). Sinful desires are spoken of in terms of those desires that want to please the flesh. The Apostle Paul describes these desires of the flesh very clearly in the book of Galatians. Paul includes the following: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and things like these (Galatians 5:19-21). These are desires of the flesh.

Finally, 1 Peter 5:8 reveals the devil’s presence, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy, the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” It is very clear, there is an evil presence on this earth...a fallen angel who seeks to destroy us through lies and tricks that take us away from God.

So, what do we as Christians do about this? Well, the Apostle Paul tells of the tools that we have to fight against the evils in this world. Paul tells us to “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Before we move forward to the actual tools used to defend ourselves in this battle, I want to make sure that we take notice of a word that is used repetitively in today’s verses. The word is **stand**. Listen to how it is used: Put on the full armor of

God, so that you can take your **stand** against the devil's schemes." Paul continues, "Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to **stand** your ground, and after you have done everything to **stand**. **Stand** firm then."

When you read this, you might wonder if this is really good warfare, after all, where is the offensive move coming from in "standing?" Standing doesn't seem like a way to win a war or a battle, in fact, it seems somewhat ineffective. However, as we consider the tactics of the Roman army, you will begin to understand how important the tactic of "standing" was. The Roman army learned from another group of warriors, the Spartans, that the frontline forces carried large shields that were rectangular in shape. As they approached the enemy, the frontline of the Roman army would complete a tactical move called "turtling." They would lock their shields together forming a wall and a cover. This made any attempt by the enemy to shoot arrows or fire catapults useless. When the enemy became frustrated, they would then advance their troops and try to break into the "turtle" which caused them to tire. At this point, the Roman cavalry would come in from the sides and decimate the enemy's frontline.

With this in mind, let's look at the way that we are armed to do battle with the evils in this world.

Paul begins with the "belt of truth buckled around your waist." Within a soldier's tools, especially a Roman soldier, the belt was one of the major pieces of equipment as the belt held everything together. The tunic would be held in check, the breastplate would be fastened to it, and the sword would hang from it. If the belt is weak and breaks, everything falls apart.

Likewise for the Christian, truth is the one thing that we use to hold everything together. That is why the truth of the Gospel is so important to us. If we falter and move away from the truth, if we tell white lies, if we try to align our views with the world's by compromising the Gospel, then everything in our armor falls apart. You may be thinking that understanding the truth and being truthful is pretty obvious for standing our ground. However, consider our country's view of truth. In the 1960s, 65 percent of Americans said they believed the Bible is true; today that figure has dropped to 32 percent. Even more dramatically, today 67 percent of all Americans deny that there's any such thing as truth. Seventy percent say there are no moral absolutes. You had better tighten your belt.

Next Paul points to the "breastplate of righteousness." In preparation for this sermon, I read several articles and noted how many of the authors were quick to point out that the breastplate of righteousness is often mistaken. Sometimes we

confuse the word righteousness as an action that we produce. However, in this context, we need to consider the breastplate of righteousness in conjunction with our relationship with Jesus Christ. The only way that we have gained righteousness is through justification, and that justification comes through the saving grace given by Jesus. It is not something we can produce. When we put on Jesus as our breastplate, every flaming arrow shot by the devil will be pushed aside.

Next Paul moves to the feet as “your feet are fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace.” When I think of a soldier preparing for battle, for some reason I have a memory of the movie Forrest Gump, as Gump’s commanding officer, Lieutenant Dan, explained the importance of good footwear. Lieutenant Dan said, “There is one item of G.I. gear that can be the difference between a live grunt and a dead grunt. Socks, cushion, sole, O.D. green. Try to keep your feet dry when we’re out humpin’. I want you boys to remember to change your socks whenever we stop.” The importance of footwear is true for the Christian as well. Our feet need to hold on to something that will give us the ability to stand firm. It must protect our feet and give us stability. In life, there are times that we try to stand on things like secular politics or a social issue. Standing on these items force us away from the solid ground provided by the Gospel and then we slip and fall away the truth.

Now Paul describes the Shield of Faith. As I mentioned earlier, the shield was a very important tool for the Roman soldier. Generally, the soldier’s shield was large and rectangular. It was made of leather and the soldier would soak it in water before battle. This would allow the shield to extinguish the flaming arrows shot by the enemy. For you and I, the shield of faith represents the faith we proclaimed when we gave ourselves to Jesus. This faith gives us the power to extinguish the devil’s flaming arrows that we feel in the form of doubt, fear, and unbelief.

Paul then points to the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. The helmet of salvation and the Sword of Spirit are linked together. The helmet of salvation covers our head and protects our minds from the lies created by satan. This allows us to be able to use the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Just a little note here: the Greek word used in this section is not the word “logos” which means written word. The Greek word that is used is the word “Rhema” which is the spoken word of God. The Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God spoken by us to help others in understanding the truth that is present in our relationship with Christ Jesus.

The Lord has provided each and every one of us with the equipment necessary to fight the evils of this world and to overcome the tactics of satan. Now

I would like to challenge each of you to think about these tools every morning when you get dressed and prepare for the day that you will face.

As you pull your shirt over your head, think about the breastplate of righteousness and how through Jesus' sacrifice, you are justified and made righteous to the Lord. As you think about this righteousness, think about the instructions you have received from the Lord. If you have an area in your life in which you are struggling with sin, ask a church leader or a trusted friend to share a piece of scripture that will help you follow the Lord's plan in a better manner.

When you pull up your socks and put on your shoes, imagine the Lord enveloping you with His Gospel of Peace. The peace that we receive when we understand and believe in the Gospel of Christ allows us to shake loose of the anxiety and worry that this world creates. The Gospel of Peace will allow you to stand firm with your Lord and be anchored in the peace of Jesus.

Next, when you bring your belt around your waste, imagine that you are anchoring yourself in God's Word, not just a part of it that pertains to one aspect of life, but the whole Bible. By anchoring yourself in the whole of God's Word, you can begin to look at the world through the lens of the Bible. I think this is incredibly important as today's society seems to want to look at the Bible through the lens of world, which distorts and misguides people away from God's truth.

When you comb your hair or put on your hat, imagine the helmet of salvation being placed on your head. We recognize that salvation is a gift that comes to us when we place our faith in Jesus and believe in his death and resurrection as God's Son. As we go through this journey of salvation, we need to recognize that the main battlefield is within our own mind. To help overcome the negative thoughts we need to have scripture on our mind through the renewing of God's Word. You might do this by adding a daily devotion to your morning, adding an app to your phone that gives you a verse for the day, or joining a Bible study. According to Romans 12:2, Paul tells us "not to conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- His good, pleasing and perfect will."

Next, when you put on your jacket or coat (as we will soon be doing), think about the shield of faith provided through the hearing of God's Word (Romans 10:17). As you think about faith, you may want to change your focus a bit. Rather than simply focusing on your faith in God, allow yourself to focus on the faith of God's character and His faith in you. God promises that there is nothing that can separate us from His love. "Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers

of hell can separate us from the love of God. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In other words, God’s got this—whatever “this” is for you.

Finally, when you take that pen in your hand or when you begin to speak, think about the sword of the Spirit. You have the ability to use your words-- written or spoken-- to reveal or dismiss God’s truth. When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil, He responded with “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God,” “Do not put the Lord your God to the test,” and “worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.” Jesus didn’t turn away and make up his own statements, He turned to the Word of God to thwart the devil’s schemes.

When you get dressed every morning, you have an opportunity to arm yourself or to disarm yourself. You can allow the world, the flesh, or the devil to lead by allowing them to pull on the chains of your desire-- OR you can let Christ crucify the evils of the world by surrendering to Him and arming yourself with His armor.

And all God’s people said...