

Ben Libby

Sermon

September 5th, 15th Sunday after Pentecost

To the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the One who is, who was, and is to come, to Him be glory forever amen. (Rev 1:8 NKJ)

Our sermon text for this Sunday is taken from Ephesians, the last chapter, beginning with verse 10:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, 15 and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. 16 At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. 17 Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints. 19 Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.

This is the Word of the LORD!!!

Mercy, Grace, and peace are yours through your God and Father, and through His Son, Jesus Christ, true God and Man, dear fellow Sons and Daughters of the King...

Today is the first Sunday in September. When you think about September, what comes to mind? Labor Day? School back in session? The leaves beginning to turn.

I don't know about you, but for me September means football. We just had the first full weekend of College Football yesterday, and this week we will have Professional Football resuming.

What is the best strategy when it comes to winning football games? Should you simply try to run up the score, or should you try to use efficient game management? Do you use your resources to try to develop a potent offensive, or a stout defense, or try to be balanced? Is what they say true? Is "the best offense a good defense?"

There are a lot of variables that you cannot control in football. The weather, the kickoff time, the crowd, the strength of the competition. But there is one

aspect that any team should control. In fact, if you fail to give it the proper attention, this factor could lose you the game. It is the equipment. What would happen if your favorite team took the field, but all 11 players forgot to wear their helmets? The officials would not let them even start. You must have the proper equipment before you are able to even begin to compete.

Here, at the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesian congregation, the Apostle implores these Christians to **Put on the full armor of God**. Our battle is not one of friendly competition for entertainment. Rather, it is a life and death struggle. The only way we can endure it is by being properly equipped. We need to don the full armor of God, because the enemy will certainly throw everything it has at you. But when we do, there is nothing that the full force of Satan can ever challenge you with. We stand strongly in and for our Savior. His strength will allow you to stand, His armor

will allow you to withstand, and His Spirit will allow you to stand up for Him! And so, we pray: LORD, SANTICIFY US BY YOUR TRUTH, YOUR WORD IS TRUTH, AMEN!

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil.

This is the end of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church. He leaves them with one final thought to summarize this whole epistle. Ephesians is basically a "how to" letter. It's essential reading for any Christian. Basically, the point of the book is "how to live as a Christian".

You need to learn to crawl before you walk, and you need to learn to walk before you run. Everyone knows this, but when you have a small child learning these things, small steps become milestones. My son William is not even one year old yet. But we have enjoyed watching him learn these things. First, a child learns how to roll over. Next, they learn how to scooch, that is, army crawl. Then they crawl upright, on their hands and knees. Then, they learn how to stand. Finally, they take their first steps. Throughout this whole process, there is a lot of falling down, bumping, and face planting. But this is how we all learn.

Paul's whole point here is that you need to have the whole armor of God if you are going to stand. Usually, it's easier to stand if you don't have heavy clothing weighing you down. But the armor of God is not heavy. In fact, it is quite the opposite! Jesus said, **"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Mat 11:29-30 NKJ)**

Standing isn't that big of a deal. But it is for babies. You can bet that when my son took his first steps, it was a big deal that his mother and I applauded vigorously. At some point for all of us, standing, crawling, and rolling over stops being significant and

starts becoming ordinary. But, what if you were in a terrible accident, and ordinary everyday walking became impossible. Wouldn't it be a tremendous thing to be able to walk again through painful rehabilitation and physical therapy?

Note here, Paul/the Holy Spirit is not imploring us to raise up and defeat Satan and his unholy army. No, that has already been accomplished by our Savior when He went to the cross and rose from the dead the third day. No, all we are called to do is stand. But, for sinners dead in their trespasses and sins, this is about as hard to do as it would be for my one-year-old to run a 4.5 40 yard dash. There is only one way in which we are able to stand up under the heavy fire of Satan. It is by being strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. It is by pointing on the full armor of God. We are called to stand, and the only way that could be accomplished was by Jesus being raised up on the cross.

What does this "full armor of God" entail? Well, Paul goes into detail: **14 Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, 15 and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. 16 At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. 17 Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**

It would be shocking to witness a football game where every player forgot their helmets. It is about as essential as it gets for football equipment. Or what if they all forgot to where their shoulder pads? Or, what if they wore slippers instead of football cleats? Or, what if they all came out in jeans instead of football pants? Surely, their performance would suffer, and their safety would be in peril.

Ephesians is one of Paul's prison letters. It could be easily imagined that Paul spent a lot of time around Roman soldiers while he was imprisoned. Perhaps he

was looking at one such soldier when he wrote these words. He could see them all decked out in all their military uniform. If the soldier went into battle without even one piece of their equipment, they would be vulnerable. So too us if we don't have every piece of this armor on. You need to have every piece of it!

So, what does this "full armor" entail? **the belt of truth/ the breastplate of righteousness/ the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals/ the shield of faith/ the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.** What do these things all have in common? It is impossible to look at these various things and not think of Jesus. The belt of truth? **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. (Joh 14:6 NKJ)** The breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation? **For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, And a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, And was clad with zeal as a cloak. (Isa 59:17 NKJ)** The shoes of the Gospel? **How beautiful upon the mountains Are the feet of him who brings good news, Who proclaims peace, Who brings glad tidings of good things, Who proclaims salvation, Who says to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isa 52:7 NKJ)**

But, one of these things is not like the other. These are all defensive tools. But there is one weapon that we possess in the whole armor of God. It is the sword of the spirit, which Paul calls here the Word of God! How is the Word a weapon? **For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb 4:12 NKJ)**

We all know how sharp the Word is, because we have all been cut by it. It reminds me of what most police departments insist on for their officers to use taser guns. Many police departments require that before an officer is given a taser gun to use, they must first be shot with it themselves! It's important that the first feel the effects of the weapon before they

themselves use it. It may seem extreme, but many departments say it's important so that they aren't used inappropriately.

We ourselves have been shocked by the Word. It has cut us long ago. But to have your Word certification, it's not a one-time thing. We need daily cutting. Our old Adam is ever present and keeps coming back for more. We are called to use that sharp doubled edged sword on others. But it also needs to be used constantly on ourselves.

Being equipped with the full armor of God allows us to stand, but it also allows us to withstand. We shouldn't be able to do either. We should not be able to stand because of our sins. But it allows us to be saints, despite of how sinful we are. We also shouldn't be able to withstand the attacks we are attacked with. This is not like a football team, or even a military force. No, the attacks Paul is warning us against are different. **12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**

These are the supernatural forces of sin. The enemies we face are Satan and his forces, the world, and our own flesh. They will throw everything they have at you. We need to be decked out in the full armor of God, or we will have a weak point. The only way we are able to withstand these attacks is by the One who withstood them. The conqueror, Jesus Christ! **Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Rom 8:37 NKJ)**

And what do conquerors do? They subdue and expand. Our hearts have been conquered by Christ's love for us. Where we were once enemies, His love conquered and transformed us. Paul talks about this at length in this epistle. When he spoke of how we were saved by grace through faith, first he brings up how we were natural enemies of God. But we are now

on the other side. We are no longer enemies of God. Now, by grace through faith, we are in the LORD's army.

It's an army of one. It has one single purpose. Christ has won the victory. We now are just emissaries. All we do is spread the word that the war is over. We proclaim His name. And, we pray in His name! **18 At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints. 19 Pray for me also, that when I open my mouth a message will be given to me that boldly reveals the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may speak about it boldly, as it is necessary for me to speak.**

Isn't it strange that Paul asks for the help of these newer Christians? Well, not at all! He knew what the power of prayer could do. Paul points out in the first chapter that he did not **cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers (Eph 1:16 NKJ)** Now, since he was facing a challenging time locked up for Christ, he wants their prayers also, so that he could do what he had to. Declare the name of Jesus!

The full armor of God is not necessarily comfortable. In fact, it is quite strange in the eyes of the world. What if you walked around everywhere you went in a suit of armor? Wouldn't people think you were strange? Or, if you went to the grocery store dress up like a football player. Wouldn't that be strange looking? Wouldn't the natural reaction of anyone you came in contact be, "Why are you dressed like that?"

We know why we are dressed like this. It is because our enemies are ever on the prowl. The world sees it quite differently. If you were to tell someone who did not believe in Jesus that they have to watch out for the devil, they would probably laugh at you. After all, *"The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist"*

But the threat is very real. The devil does not worry about people who have no faith. They can wander their way to him on their own. No, schemes (as Paul puts it here) they are against those who have faith. He's not going around like a roaring lion to scheme unbelievers away, they come to him. No, the Devil attacks believers, he is trying to find the weak spot in your defenses.

This is why we need to be ready for anything. That is what having the full armor of God really means. It means that no matter what happens, we have been fully equipped by God to deal with it. If we should suffer personal loss, we have the gospel of peace that will run us back to God's love. If we have committed some terrible sin and forgiveness seems unlikely, we have the breastplate of righteousness strapped to our chests that Jesus has won for us. Or if it looks like death is inevitable, well we have that helmet of salvation which protects us with the knowledge that we will go to heaven. And when Satan comes to accuse us, we have the shield of faith which will extinguish his attacks. Then we counterattack with the Sword of the Word, just like our Savior did in the face of temptation in the wilderness. When we have the full armor of God, we can say, "Away with you Satan, for it is written!"

If you end up watching some football this upcoming week, take a second to look at the equipment that the players are wearing. Look at the helmets, the uniforms, the pads, the cleats. All of these things are worn for specific reasons. They can take big hits and do great things.

For us, all we are looking to do is stand. Sadly, this is impossible for sinners to do. Our huge load of sins weighs us down. But then Christ comes along, removes your sin and guilt forever, and clothes you in His righteous armor. We were once enemies against God. Now we stand and fight for Him.

We have been given the full armor of God. No one can remove it from you! It not only protects you here,

but it will also protect you until His victory is complete. When we are with Him in heaven, we will have no need for armor, for all warfare will cease forever. On earth, through the grace of God we stand and fight for Him. In Heaven, we will stand and worship Him forever. AMEN!!!