

“The Armour Of God”

15 November 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call To Worship:

Hymn of Preparation: This Is Amazing Grace

Prayers of Adoration & Confession: Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 59:15a-17b

New Testament Reading: Ephesians 6:10-18

Sermon:

I. Evil is real.

Evil is real, and the consequences of it are threatening and destructive; they result in the loss of life. Therefore, having protection from evil is essential. Humanity is susceptible to the devil's schemes and evil is prevalent. There is considerable evidence of this fact. I took a few minutes to recall what I have read and watched on the news this week, and I speak in general terms: domestic abuse, murder suicide, hungry children, rising homelessness, false religion, totalitarian oppression, climate change, food shortage, war, waste, sexual immorality, greed, lack of honesty and integrity in leadership, exploitation of workers, human trafficking, disease. Concerning the persecuted church: forced marriage, discrimination because of one's faith, imprisonment for worshiping God, lack of freedom, genuine hardships and threats experienced every day from the state and other religious groups implacably opposed to Jesus Christ.

The prophet Isaiah lamented, *“So justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness, for brightness but we walk in deep shadows”* (59:9).

Evil is real, and the consequences of it are threatening and destructive; they result in the loss of life.

II. God is the warrior.

When confronted by evil, we look for justice and protection. In our world, God often provides this through the State or government. If such protection is missing, we are vulnerable and we are rightly concerned, even angry; we look for those whose responsibility and authority it is to provide justice and protection.

“The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no-one, He was appalled that there was no one to intervene” (Isaiah 59:15b-16a).

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing” (traditionally attributed to Edmund Burke).

We need someone to stand for what is right and just. Isaiah goes on to say that God took on that role, for individuals and leaders had failed to do.

“So His own arm worked salvation for Him, and His own righteousness sustained Him. He put on righteousness as His breastplate and the helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped Himself in zeal as in a cloak” (59:16b-17).

God is the warrior; He fights, has defeated the devil and rules in the heavenly realms. He has left His people, the Church, on earth to continue this fight until He returns.

Maybe you are feeling scared and vulnerable. You see the reality of evil: opposition from within (temptation) and from without (attitudes of others and society in scorn for your beliefs and the effect of evil as outlined in our news). You are aware of the reality of the devil. Remember that Jesus has taken the fight to the devil and won! We are called to join with Him, so that others may be won for Christ, the world saved from darkness and given the certain hope that those who are on His side share in the victory and in the glory of heaven when He comes again. God is the warrior, and we stand in Him and with Him.

III. Put on the full armour of God.

The call for us all is to be strong in the Lord and put on the full armour of God. We are to be salt and light; we are to fight with the Lord's armour. But it is important that we understand what that the armour is!

- A. **The belt of truth:** Jesus is the truth. His word is true. The Scriptures are a record of the truth. Therefore, know what you believe; read, learn, and meditate on the Scriptures, every day living by their truth and principles. Be like the people from the town of Berea, who *“received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true”* (Acts 17:11). Conversely, reject what is false. Endeavour to be thoroughly honest with God and with yourself. The older versions of the Bible translate this verse, *“having your loins girt with truth”* - we might say tuck your shirt in, pull up your trousers. Truth prepares you for action. Get ready by knowing the truth. Truth is, as everyone knows, under attack, but we reject any move to not live by the truth. It is vital in the battle to be truthful.
- B. **The breastplate of righteousness:** We are to put on a garment that protects our vital organs (so to speak), that gives us righteousness and makes us righteous. This is not by our works but simply by the gift of faith in the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross. We are imputed with Christ's righteousness and we are also given (imparted) righteousness. What is the purpose of such righteousness?

It aids us against the accusations of the devil (which means “slanderer”) or Satan (which means “adversary”). He will remind us of our sin and tell us we are useless, unable to be what we claim to be. In response, we say, “I have been given righteousness in Christ and I stand because of Him, His work and His character.”

It gives us a love of what is right and hatred of what is wrong. When I was at theological college, one of my professors had received a heart transplant. We had some interesting chats, as he knew I had studied medicine. What struck me were all the unintended consequences of having a heart from another. I became interested in those stories, the kind of information not found in a textbook. One story was of another heart transplant recipient who had developed a love of lobster meat and in their investigations about why this might be so, discovered that the person whose heart they received had shared a similar passion for lobster.

Being in Christ, receiving the Holy Spirit, gives us His character and His righteousness. We begin to have His concerns: we love what He loves and hate what He hates. We then work with Him to follow one and discard the other. *“Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed”* (Psalm 119:136).

- C. **The shoes of readiness of the gospel of peace:** A good soldier will always have strong boots and the Romans were no different. Made of leather with studded soles and strapped to the ankles, they were both flexible and sturdy. However, the striking thing here is the concept of readiness. Soldiers should be available at a moment's notice, should be prepared and trained in different methods of combat. Christian soldiers must be ready to move with the gospel of peace. The devil brings a lack of peace, mainly in a disruption of relationships, and the soldier of Christ is quick and ready to bring the gospel of peace to bear on hostile relationships and dismantle barriers. *“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one, and has destroyed the barrier the dividing wall of hostility”* (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* (Matthew 5:9).

Jesus readily agreed to come to earth to bring peace to us; we are called to be ready to move at His command to bring the gospel wherever we can, to bring the good news of peace. In your daily walk with God, you will encounter relationship difficulty and see the sadness of disobedience to God's ways. The soldier of Christ will bring the good news of the gospel - the light, the salt - to bear in those situations with word and deed.

In addition to all this, take up:

- D. **The shield of faith.** The shield was large and essential in battle. The flaming arrows of the evil one will come your direction. There are some important steps to take here for effective use of the shield.

Expect that in the activities of your life evil will attack you. It is not always possible to fully comprehend what is going on, but we need to ask God for a recognition of the flaming arrows of the evil one. Our fight is by defence, the defence of faith: faith in God and in His word, looking to Jesus, having a childlike trust, holding to His promises. Recall, believe, hear from God, trust Him and praise Him for His character (not the difficulty). That is how faith overcomes.

We explored this idea in our 3D group this week, looking at Psalm 46. It helped us; it increased our faith and the flaming arrows of the evil one were extinguished. I was personally helped by v.5: *“God is within her, she will not fall, God will help her at break of day.”* Those words from God increased my faith, took the focus away from me, helped me appreciate the love God has for the Church and the promise He has given concerning her, outworking this right up to the present day. So, we face another day. No other defence will be effective, and because we do not utilise it, it is often the reason we struggle more and longer than we should, or that we are defeated.

This is not only individualistic. This is what church community is about: sharing and helping lift up the shield for us, being together, prayer, practical support, sharing Scripture. In doing so, you are raising up the shield of faith. Recognise the evil one's

arrows, fight by the defence of faith with all you know of Jesus and invite the Church to help you in honest fellowship.

- E. **The helmet of salvation.** I was hit by a car once on my bike in the Dublin mountains; I went out over the handlebars, landing on my head and the side of my face, and ended up in hospital. My helmet was cracked but, as far as I can tell, my head was ok. Your brain is especially important and is itself protected in a bony helmet called the skull. So, when I see someone cycling without a helmet, or more particularly when I see the helmet on the handlebars, I think, “that’s stupid.” Wear it! Put it on!

In his letter to the church in Thessalonica, Paul wrote “*put on... the hope of salvation as a helmet*” (1Thess 5:8). If we are to live life well, positively with purpose, determination and focus, we must have hope. A Covid vaccine gives hope that the pandemic will ease; it allows us, as I heard one lady on radio say, to put up with the loss of Christmas for one year.

Put on the helmet of salvation! Remind yourself of the truth of what God has done for you, the status and hope of heaven you now have. I encourage each of us to read Ephesians 1:3-14 every day this week, asking God to impart its truth to our souls. You are chosen, redeemed and sealed in love for a relationship with God in the heavenly realms, now and forever. You are a child of God; You have the Holy Spirit as a deposit of an eternal inheritance and, with that reality, we live with hope and confidence. Put on your helmet of salvation!

- F. **The sword of the spirit.** Paul told Timothy that Scripture was God-breathed, literally God's breath or spirit, and he confirms here that the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God. The Scriptures are to be used and our example is Jesus, who answered with the word of God when asked questions about marriage, resurrection, and why He spent so much time with sinners. He used it to teach His disciples and to refute the devil's misuse of Scripture when He faced him and temptations in the desert. He fought with the Scriptures; He used the Scriptures. The importance of this weapon is paramount in living successfully as a Christian. The Word of God guides, reassures, convicts, and brings others to Jesus. It is essential and you need it with you in your heart as you endeavour to live well for Jesus.

When you see someone riding a bike without a helmet or with it on their handlebars, remember that, as a Christian who desires to live a good life for Jesus, we are urged to put on the full armour and take it with us in our daily walk. We do that using all the means God has given us - church community, listening to and recalling the message of the sermon, 3D groups, personal prayer and Bible reading - as we actively live out our relationship with God in Christ. Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power.

Hymn of Reflection: We Trust In You (We Rest On Thee, Our Shield And Our Defender)

Prayers for Others: Ethan Boyd

Announcements

Closing Hymn: O Church, Arise (Arise, Shine)

Benediction: To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory,

majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

Discussion & Application:

1. Have you been aware recently of the reality of evil and its attack, personally or in society? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?
2. How should you deal with this reality, considering Paul's instruction in these verses?
3. Consider in more detail a piece of the armour. What protection does it give? What practical steps can you take each day to put it on?