

A Soldier Ready for Battle ***Ephesians 6:10-20***

Introduction

In 1865, English pastor Sabine Baring-Gould wanted the children of his parish to sing a marching song as they walked from his church building in Horbury Bridge to a church in nearby Wakefield Yorkshire. He could not find one he liked, so he decided to write one. And in a matter of 15 minutes, he composed the words to one of the most famous hymns of all time: Onward, Christian Soldiers.

Two passages of Scripture, both written by the Apostle Paul, were the inspiration for his composition:

Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:3)

And of course, our text for today: Ephesians 6:10-20. The armor of God.

Interestingly, the original tune was a slow, plodding one, but Arthur Sullivan liked the words and composed the tune we sing today. You might have heard of him. He was one half of the Gilbert and Sullivan duo who collaborated on "Pirates of Penzance" and "H.M.S. Pinafore."

In the 1980s editors for several hymnbooks tried to remove this hymn from their new editions because it sounded too "militaristic" (that is, not in keeping with the Christian theme of love that was then and is now the orienting Christian doctrine that moves many people). Of course, Christians protested, and the editors were forced to put the song back into the books.

As Pastor Gould – the author of the hymn – wrote:

I am more surprised than anyone at the song's popularity. (Sabine Baring-Gould)

This is the final sermon in a six-week series that seeks to answer the question "Who Am I?" My goal in this series is to help each of us understand and confidently affirm our identity in Jesus, so that ...

When I say, "I am a Christian," what does that mean? Who am I?

So far in this series we have defined ourselves as:

- Christians who are built on firm foundation of faith that sustains us through the storms of life
- Christians who sink their roots down in the affirming love of God
- Christians who are only one part – but one very important part – of the Body of Christ
- Christians who, like body builders, build up the Body of Christ.
- Christians who are filled to the brim with an attitude of gratitude.

Today our focus is the passage of Scripture known as the armor of God. You probably guessed that already. Here's our key verse:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (Ephesians 6:11)

J. C. Ryle was an Anglican Bishop in the late 1800s. He wrote and preached often about his concern that many Christians have come to Christ under what he called "a false sales pitch."

- Perhaps, he said, they were told, "Jesus will solve your problems. He will give you peace and joy. He will give you a happy family life. Come to Jesus and enjoy all of these blessings and more. He promises you abundant life."
- And so they signed up for what they thought would be a wonderful life of peace and happiness.

All of those claims are true, but they're only half of the picture.

- Jesus did promise to give us abundant life (John 10:10). But He also said that He was sending us out as sheep in the midst of wolves (Matthew 10:16).
- Jesus promised peace, but in the same breath He said that in this world we would have tribulation (John 16:33).
- He assured us of His love for us, but He went on to say that the world would hate and persecute us (John 15:12-13, 18-21).

One of the essential truths of the Scripture is this:

When you became a Christian, you were drafted into God's army.

And every day, you are engaged in a battle with an unseen spiritual enemy.

For our struggle is not against 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 6:12)

If you don't grasp this, when those trials come, you will think that something is wrong and you will wonder why God has allowed this to happen.

- The Christian is at war against the forces of evil in the world. We are not at war against human beings. We are fighting the forces of evil. The devil. And if we have any hope of winning we need to "Put on the full armor of God."

Who am I? I am a Christian soldier who is equipped and ready for battle.

How do I fight? I stand. Look at what this text teaches:

#1: STAND AGAINST (v. 11)

Look at verse 11 one more time:

Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (Ephesians 6:11)

In my studies for this sermon, I came across this powerful statement:

You are up against more than you can handle on your own!

For most of us life is pretty much the same. We know what to expect and we have figured out how to cope with the normal stuff we face every day. Life is pretty predictable.

- When I come home for supper, my wife will generally ask me "How was your day?" My response often goes like this: "It was a Tuesday."

There is a danger in that sort of routine. After a while, we forget what we are up against. And lest we forget, Paul reminds us:

For our struggle is not against 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 6:12)

You and I are up against invisible spiritual forces every moment of every day. Most days we aren't aware of it ... and those might be the most dangerous days of them all, because that silent enemy continues his work.

So Paul says "Hey Christian Soldier! Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the devil's schemes." And put it on so that you can ...

#2: STAND YOUR GROUND (v. 13)

I direct you to verse 13:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground ... (Ephesians 6:13)

When you go to the beach next time, try standing in the edge of the water – right to the spot where the waves wash in and out over your feet. Try standing your ground in that spot. You know what happens, right? The waves wash away the ground you on which you are standing.

- Every good TV western has at least one episode involving someone stuck in quicksand. The ground gives way, and there they are ... unable to stand their ground.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talks about the importance of standing on solid ground. Many of us have an appreciation for how the Bible paraphrase called "The Message" bluntly communicates the truth of Scripture. Here is how that story reads:

(Jesus speaking) These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was firmly fixed to the rock.

But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards. (Matthew 7:24-27, The Message)

The solid rock – the solid ground is the truth of the Gospel. So with our lives anchored on that solid ground and protected by the full armor of God, when those storms come and those waves roll in, we are able to stand out ground. We don't get knocked down by those troubling times of life.

On Christ the solid rock I stand ... All other ground is sinking sand.

And then Paul concludes with this:

#3: STAND FIRM (v. 14)

Verse 14:

Stand firm then ... (Ephesians 6:14)

The first two points were intentional actions Paul calls on us to take. Standing firm is different. It is a consequence of putting on that armor. When we are properly equipped, we have no reason to retreat!

- Around our waist is wrapped the belt of truth – our lives are encircled not by popular opinion or current political correctness issues. We are wrapped securely in what the Scriptures teach and only in that.
- Our vital organs are protected with the breastplate of righteousness. Like a catcher's chest protector, none of those incoming missiles can penetrate our hearts. When you are clothed in righteousness, the accusations of this world bounce off.
- On our feet we wear the sandals of readiness. We are eager to share the good news of Jesus with the world around us with those who have never heard.
- There is the shield of our faith. The Roman shield described here covered the entire body – head to toe. That is what goes before us. It is out front, handling every fiery dart of the devil.
- Our heads are covered with the helmet of salvation, reminding us that we have been forgiven and that because of the blood of Jesus no matter what happens we are safe and secure in him. Our thoughts are guided by Him, and fear has no place in there.

- At our side is the sword – God's Word. It is the weapon we carry with us. We never try to win an argument based on our own logic. We simply say “What does God's Word say” and we live according to that.

But the greatest weapon of them all is our ability to pray – to talk with God about anything anytime anywhere. In spiritual warfare, you need a spiritual weapon. And so we pray.

APPLICATION

Several years ago, I watched a PBS Special that covered the events leading up to the "Battle of the Bulge" during WWII. It was the autumn of 1944 and Germany had been beaten back behind its borders. The Nazi war machine was in tatters and the repeated bombing raids of the Allies all but assured that Hitler's forces would never rise again. Around the perimeter of Germany's borders, the Allies spread a thin line of forces. One person observed that Allied forces were so scattered that a man could slip between its lines without being observed.

All across Europe, there was celebration. Parties, dances, speeches all rejoicing in Germany's defeat. The war was effectively over. The only problem was (pause) somebody forgot to tell Germany.

Even as his forces were being shattered and driven back Hitler was devising a plan for one last onslaught. Underground factories churned out more weapons, armament and ammunition. More of Germany's young and old men were conscripted and trained for war. And as Europe rejoiced, Hitler planned.

His goal was not to drive back the Allies into the sea, as much as it was to divide the British to the North and Americans to the South, so demoralizing them that they would sue for peace on his terms.

In the days that followed hundreds if not thousands of men died because somebody forgot that the enemy still lived and that the war was NOT (completely) over.

We are still in a battle, and we will be until Jesus comes back. Never forget that! Every morning make sure you are dressed and ready.

Amen.