

April 21, 2013 - You Stand Here

Last week there was a story that I had to cut out so I want to share it this week. Instead, and it's a story, last week we talked about husbands and wives, so I remember when I was a teenager, this older gentleman told me a story about his wedding day. I'll try to tell this without getting all emotional about it. He told me about his wedding day and he said, many, many decades ago when he got married, at their ceremony they only had hymns for music, which was quite common. There was one of the hymns that he mentioned in particular that stuck in my mind that day. So I want you to try and picture this scene if you would...it's during the wedding and they're standing up at the front and they're gazing lovingly into each other's eyes and the ceremony is going well. They're standing there looking at each other and it's just before 'you may kiss the bride' part, so they're standing there and the minister says: "Congregation please rise and turn to hymn number 511. Everyone stands up and they're standing there gazing in each other's eyes and the congregation begins to sing: "The fight is on, the trumpet sound is ringing out. The cry to war is heard from far and near." And I thought "Really!" And I'm not making it up. That's what he said. He said that was one of the songs at their wedding. Well, whoever picked out the songs for their wedding must have liked the book of Ephesians, because in the book of Ephesians last week we were talking about husbands and wives and the relationship between them. Then Paul makes this very natural segway from that into talking about armour and battle and things like that, in Chapter 6, which is where we're going today.

This morning we just want to wrap up the series we've been doing here in Ephesians and Paul is kind of wrapping up his letter. Basically as he gets to the end of Chapter 6 here, what he's trying to say to the people in Ephesus is, "You know we've kind of laid all this out. We've laid out who God is and we've laid out how we respond to that a little bit and that all sounds really good but before I sign off, I need to make note that sometimes, things might not always be easy. At times you're Christian walk, your spiritual journey, just might be a battle. You remember we talked about this several weeks ago when we began that the City of Ephesus, the context in which these people were living was not a Christian context. It was noted for the Temple of Artemis, which we've said several times is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. That was the big religion of the town and everyone in Ephesus was very proud of being the City that had the Temple of Artemis in it. Beyond that, there was four different times where the Emperor of the Roman Empire had designated Ephesus as his kind of special town and so there were big temples and statues to honour those guys. So that's the context in which these Christians are living. The first time Paul comes there and visits and starts talking about Jesus, and starts converting some people to the Christian faith, you remember people started getting upset about that and kind of anxious about that. One guy who was making statues of Artemis got everyone riled up and he gathered a couple of Paul's companions and dragged them into the theatre and half the town showed up and there was this big riot that was about to happen. They were all upset because of this new Christianity that had come to town and what Paul was preaching about and essentially, chased Paul out of town. So that's kind of the context in which these people are living and sure, it's been

several years since then but it's still kind of where they are at. So, really compared to our modern world, it's different in a lot of ways but at the same time, as we kind of look at our modern context there are places in the world where Christianity is met with that kind of resistance and hostility. Even here in North America things have changed over the last 50 years and now Christianity is more the exception than the rule in a lot of places and a lot of times. Especially in media, Christian faith can be a little bit mocked and scoffed at. So there are some similarities to the situation they were in and the context to one that we face. So maybe this final admonition of Paul does have something for us to take note of.

A quick reminder of where we're coming from. Paul wrote his letter to the Ephesians and it was probably around 59/60 A.D. and people based on the Book of Acts and piecing things together, we figure that at the time Paul wrote the Book of Ephesians, he was most likely in Rome and was under house arrest. He was confined to the house he was living in. And the interesting thing about that is, if you read Acts 28, it says that he was confined to his house and that there was a soldier placed there to guard him. And so as we read this part in Chapter 6 about the armour of God I can just imagine Paul sitting there and writing and then glancing over at the door and looking at the guy and saying: "Hey Brutus! That's kind of a nice helmet you've got on. Why don't you tell me a little bit about that?" "Well, you know, our helmets are the best helmets in the world, blah, blah, blah." "How about that sword? I bet that boy could do some damage with that?" Oh yeah! Our swords are really good, a Spanish sword, but we made it better and now it's the best sword in the world." And so, I can imagine Paul just sitting there and looking at this guy and his armour and all the different parts of it and seeing that image in his mind and thinking: "You know what? There is something there and I'm going to write that down and I'm going to use that as an analogy and I'm going to send this in the letter to the church and there is something in here that is really going to inspire them and help them on their journey." And so, really what Paul is doing here is, he's giving us some really great imagery. So this morning, we're shorter on time than normal, and so what I want to try and do is what I think Paul was doing when he wrote this section here in Ephesians 6. I don't think he was writing a doctoral thesis on the parallels between a Roman soldiers armour and the Christian life. I don't think that's what he was doing. I think he's just taking a great image and he's saying: "You know what? We can take this image and I can send it to you and there are going to be some things that are just going to help you remember and it's going to help remind you of what God has given you in this journey." And so, that's what I want to try and do for you. Essentially, I think what Paul was doing is he says I'm going to write this story out and every time you walk down the street of Ephesus and you see a Roman soldier you're going to see him and you're going to be reminded and you're going to think: "Yeah! The shield. I remember what Paul wrote about the shield. And the helmet, you remember what he said about that." And so it's just kind of like a visual reminder everywhere you went in Ephesus that when you saw one of these guys, you would be reminded of these points that Paul had made.

And so, not a lot of Roman soldiers walking around today so I picked Tim Horton's instead and I tried to find something that I thought would be kind of the relative frequency that you

might see a Roman soldier in Ephesus. So how many, I'm not going to ask you cause I know it's everyone, but saw a Tim Horton's or 12 on the way to Church this morning, or saw someone drinking a cup of Tim Horton's or heard a Tim Horton's commercial, something like that, right? Unfortunately, Tim Horton's doesn't make a great example because we can't really talk about the donut of truth or the double/double or righteousness, that doesn't just really transfer very much so, we're going to stick with the Roman soldier but we're going to put it in the same context as the passing reminder that every time you see this, it kind of pops into your mind. Unfortunately, most of us probably aren't very familiar with Roman armour and how it was made up, and so to fully understand what Paul was talking about spiritually, we're going to need to understand what he's talking about physically. We are going to really quickly go through the Roman armour and see the different parts of it and kind of draw some really quick parallels and analogy's from that and hopefully that gives you something to jot down on your paper or jot down in your memory and then as you walk this week and through the months ahead, some of those things will hopefully stick with you. So, very quickly, here we go:

First thing and this isn't the order Paul lists them in but this is how we're going to do them this morning.

Belt Of Truth: Often pictured wrong actually, it was a very wide belt and had the strips of leather that hung down and protected the lower body but probably most importantly, the belt was the holder for a whole lot of equipment. It had the sheath that held the sword; a spot to hold the dagger; a spot for the lead weighted darts, ever played lawn darts, except without the plastic fins on them, so the soldiers would probably have half a dozen or those things attached to their belt; probably carried some rope; and then they had this bag they would have attached to their belt and it would carry their rations, their food and whatnot; and then as I read this week, it said: "Once they conquered a town they would dump all the food out and stuff whatever they could loot from the town into the bag and strap that back on. So, the belt carried all of these different things and was tied to basically all the other pieces of armour and it's what kept all of the armour in place. It was tied down so it was always facing from, so that you always knew where to grab your sword; you always knew where to grab your dart; you always knew that everything was in place and everything was ready to go. It held all the other pieces in place as well. One of the other interesting things about the belt which was usually wrong in the pictures you were going to see. Aside from the cloth tunic, the belt was the thing that was put on first. So when you were suiting up it was the first thing that you put on.

Well, what's the spiritual implications of that? The message of the belt is simply: Be prepared. Be prepared before the battle begins. The minutes and the hours that we spend in prayer and in reading and in meditation and in worship and in seeking God, those will serve us very well when the attack begins, right? Those habits and rituals will keep us prepared for when the troubled times come. They will stock us with valuable tools. They will provide us with spiritual nourishment to sustain us and at the end of the journey, they will

hold great riches for us, because the trials that may come without warning and it's too late to make preparations after they arrive. And so just as the belt goes on first and secures the rest of the armour in place, so your relationship that you cultivate with God during those calm times of life will be your first line of defence when the storm comes. That is the belt. Be Prepared.

Secondly.

The Breastplate of Righteousness, is what Paul calls it. Now the breastplate, there's not much unexpected here. A big piece of metal that covered the chest of the soldier and it was attached to the belt and it protected the key organs of the soldier and most importantly probably it is the heart.

And spiritually kind of the same thing goes with the breastplate. Protect your heart; that is the job because the heart is the prime target of attack. If you want to win the battle; if you win the battle for the heart you will win the battle for the man or the woman. Just think back to the Sermon on the Mount and the things Jesus said there. How many times did he reference the heart? He would say: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God." And then over and over again he's say things like: "You have heard it said 'Don't commit adultery' but I say 'If you lust in your heart you've already lost the battle.'" And he said "You've heard it said 'don't murder' but I say, even if you get angry in your heart, you've already lost the battle." And in the end he says: "Wherever your treasure is there your heart is also." And so, where your heart is, what wins your heart, is going to win the battle, going to win the war.

In Luke, Chapter 6, Jesus says: "The good man brings good things out from the good stored in his heart, the evil man brings evil things from the evil stored in his heart; for out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks."

Essentially what he's saying is: Whatever is in your heart is going to rule your life and so protect your heart so that what's in your heart is good and that will be a key to winning the battle.

The third thing is:

Helmet of Salvation. The Romans literally believed they had the best helmets in the world, which is a weird thing to boast about but that's what they said. Other nations would often make helmets out of cloth or animal hides or bones or hooves and things like that; but the Roman helmet had a leather lining which made it comfortable and made it fit well. The helmet itself was either out of cast bronze or if you were an officer you got iron alloy. So it was very strong, very solid. Roman helmets had chin straps so they didn't fall off. They had visors that kind of came down and covered the back and the sides of the neck and then they had a crest on top which usually showed your rank. And so, a superior helmet was a

decided advantage when you came into combat because let's face it, the last thing you want in the heat of the battle is to lose your head. And so the helmet was a key to the Roman success and the helmet protected the head and specifically it protected the brain. A good helmet, and we know this today, right? A good helmet can literally save your life.

Well, in the spiritual sense of things, along with the heart, the mind is the front line of the battle. Everything we do is literally controlled by our brains. From basic body functions, to the thoughts we think, to the opinions we hold, to the self-talk we engage in to our perspective on ourselves and on others and on life in general. That is all controlled by our brain, which is why defending our minds is so essential to victory.

The Rooted in the Word that we read earlier this morning, and I didn't know Robert was going to train us so well, but here is the things that Paul lists. He says "Whatever is true and noble and right and pure and lovely and admirable and excellent and praiseworthy, think about those things" because you're fighting the battle for your mind and if your mind focuses on those things then God is going to win the battle for your mind. In Romans 12, Verse 2, he says: Don't conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind then you'll be able to test and approve what God's will is; His good and pleasing and perfect will."

Again, the battle for the mind is key, it is the front lines of the battle against the enemy.

Interesting side note, Isaiah 59, also talks about these exact same terms. The helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness. But in Isaiah those are actually applied to God and not to people. And so Isaiah talks about God wearing the helmet of salvation and the breastplate of righteousness, so when Paul is writing the same things, if any Jews are reading this, automatically there would be a connection there to these kind of images that he was laying out.

Moving right along. The Shield of Faith.

Now, when you talk about a shield, especially a Roman shield, I do not think of them of a medieval shield or a Greek style shield, the smaller rounder style of shield; Roman shields were rectangular and they were big. Up to 3-½ feet tall and 3 feet wide. They were these huge things, usually curved a little bit. The most interesting thing about a Roman shield is that when you were marching in a group and you could gather together, you could put the shields side-by-side, and you could put shields over your head, and around the outsides of the group and you could literally make an almost impenetrable box, an almost impenetrable wall, so when people were firing arrows at you it was just a solid wall of shield all around you that you could create within this group.

Now similarly, spiritually speaking, faith is our shield and the stronger our faith is built up the stronger defence we have against attack. The important thing to realize about faith is that

the strength of faith is not based upon the person who is believing but the real strength of faith is based on the one who is believed in. So, in our case if our faith is in God then there is significant strength that is built there. Much like the Roman shields, in a group, there is always strength in community and together our faith is put together, bonded together and built together and it can ward off the attacks of the enemy. The writer of Psalms says: The Lord is my strength and my shield my heart trusts in Him and I am helped. My heart leaps for joy and I give thanks in song. The Lord is the strength of His people; a fortress of salvation for His anointed one.”

Number 5. The Sword of the Spirit.

The Roman sword, in the case the sword that Paul uses, he calls it ‘a gladius’ and the Gladius was known as the ‘Sword that conquered the World’. It had two sharpened edges on it and it could be used for both attack and for defence. Although a soldier would carry many other weapons into battle with him, his gladius, his sword, was his primary and greatest tool at his disposal.

Now spiritually speaking, we also have a sword. It’s a sword that has won over a great portion of the world over the course of history, the last two thousand years. The writer of Hebrews describes it this way: “The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” Just like the gladius, our knowledge and understanding of God’s word is both our greatest defence and our greatest means of advance. If you think back to the Gospels and you remember the time when Jesus was out in the wilderness and he was being tempted by Satan; every time Satan came to him and tried to seduce him or tried to trick him or tried to trap him, Jesus would respond by saying: “It is written.” This is what God’s word says. And often as you read through the Gospels and the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law, they’re coming to him and they’re laying out all of these different traps, quite frequently he will respond with “It is written” or “Does it not say?” and so God’s word is both his advance and his defence it is his sword that he uses in the battle.

Finally. Feet Fitted with the Gospel of Peace.

Now, as I looked at that, I thought, shoes seem to be the least important thing in this description and definitely the least armour-like, right? At least a belt has a sword strapped to it but what do shoes really have? Well, I was shocked to find that some historians say “footwear is one of the greatest reasons that the Roman army was successful in battle.” And here’s why. Roman soldiers had taken their shoes and they had driven nails through the soles of their shoes so that they basically had spikes on the bottom. Kind of like cleats that you’d wear in sports today. And so, these spikes that they had coming out of the bottom of their shoes, it would give them extra strength and stability in their stance. So when they were fighting with somebody they wouldn’t slip and fall down or if they were fighting on a

hill or uneven terrain they would have secure footing and the other guy would not.

Well spiritually speaking, our footing and our foundation is in the Gospel of Peace, which is the Good News about Jesus and that is the message that “God so loved the World that He sent His son.” It’s a message that sins are forgiven. A message that relationship with God can be restored and this message is the foundation for everything. This is the solid rock on which we stand and without this, without the Gospel, without the Good News of Jesus, we have got nothing. Without this we can delay defeat for awhile, but we will never be victorious.

Paul concludes his letter and he says: “The journey may not always be easy but God is on your side and therefore you stand here.” You stand here. You are on solid ground and you stand here. Or as he puts it: “Finally be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 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. Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand. To stand your ground. And after you have done everything, stand, stand firm then.

And that is the words that Paul signs off his Letter to the Ephesians with and those are the words that we wrap up our series with. I hope that as we have journeyed together through the Letter to the Ephesians, that you have gathered tools along the way; that you have gathered words along the way; that you have gathered images and resources along the way that remind you of who God is; of what God has done; and of who you now are, in light of who God as made you. We’ve talked about a lot of those things over the last several weeks and in the end, Paul says: “Because of all those things; because of what Jesus has done, even though the hard times will come, the troubles will come, the battle will come, because of who you are in Christ Jesus, you are able to stand.