

The Armour of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 March 2017

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] at Ephesians chapter 6, that would be a great help. And as always, you'll find an outline inside the notice sheet if you'd find it helpful just to see where we're going as we look at this portion of God's word together. But let's pray and let's ask for God's help as we hear his voice.

Let's pray. Holy Spirit, as we unleash your sword now, we ask that you would use it to accomplish your saving purposes today among us, that you would help us to see the Lord Jesus that you would write his love for us on our hearts and you would reshape us and equip us to be the people our Heavenly Father made us to be.

For we ask for Jesus' name's sake. Amen. Well, Hiro Onoda was a Japanese soldier. He was involved in guerrilla warfare in the Philippines and in 1945, his commanding officer told him to stay behind, to spy on the American troops and never to surrender or take his own life.

He spent 29 years hiding in the jungle and in 1974, a backpacker found him and managed to persuade him that the war was over. So he emerged from the jungle wearing his 30-year-old Imperial Army uniform, cap and sword, saluting, recognizing at last that the war was over.

He spent three decades of his life fighting in a war, not realizing it had finished. It was peacetime. Now, what Ephesians chapter 6 tells us is that as Christians in a city like Glasgow, we're in danger of the reverse mistake.

[1 : 3 8] We're in danger of living as though there's no danger at all, living as though there's no conflict, when all the time we're actually in a war zone, under attack.

And if we miss that, we're caught completely off guard. We're not prepared to defend ourselves. This is the climax of Ephesians. We've been in a series in it. And we've heard that the God who made us is building a trophy cabinet for himself so that the angels that he's made, the demons in the spiritual universe, they can look at this trophy cabinet and see how brilliant God is.

He's acting for his glory, his brilliance. And what he's put at the heart of his trophy cabinet is the church. The church might not look very significant to us, but it is the big thing that God is doing in the world today for his glory.

He's bringing ordinary, broken people from all backgrounds back into relationship with himself and reconciling them to each other in the church. And we've heard that God has done that through Jesus' death and resurrection, giving us every spiritual blessing, adopting us as his children, forgiving us, giving us his spirit, giving us a certain future hope.

And then in the second half of the book of Ephesians, he calls us to live out the implications of these truths. So in chapter four, verse one, he said, very strong word from the apostle Paul, I urge you, I urge you to live in a manner worthy of the calling you've received.

[3 : 15] If you let me do a kind of mini parody of a Dickens kind of story, it's a bit like if you imagine that we were like a street kid, homeless, no hope, picking pockets to survive, and some wealthy family finds us and adopts us, dresses us in their clothes, new clothes, gives us an education, a new start, a new identity, and says to us, you're a person of privilege now, we just want you to live it out.

Don't go back to picking pockets. Don't go back to being lippy and running away. You've got a home now. Be with us at home. This is your home. And be who you are.

Live out the calling that you've received from us. So we've heard how to live as a community of disciples, to be like a family, to be kind to one another, be kind to one another.

We've heard how to live out in the world, to imitate God by living lives of love in the world, then in the home, in marriage, in parenting, then at work, as good bosses, as good workers.

But the problem is, it's really difficult. Being an everyday Christian is really tough. We get annoyed with each other, don't we? We get frustrated when we don't get our own way.

[4 : 35] We lust. We lust after more money, after more sex, after more power. We get fed up with our kids, fed up with our spouses, fed up with our church. We struggle to forgive each other.

We let resentment know away at us. And that's why Paul ends Ephesians with this immense passage. It explains why we find being a Christian so difficult.

It's because we're on the front line in a cosmic spiritual conflict. Our first point this morning, wake up and be strong. There's a battle.

Just have a look with me at verse 10. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor 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.

[5 : 34] Now, in a city like Glasgow, we're surrounded by materialists, people who believe that there's nothing that exists that we can't see in our material universe.

So lots of us find it hard to believe that there's a devil. And the devil is delighted by that, that we find it hard to believe he's there, because it leaves us with our guard down.

There are other parts of the world, in places like Africa, parts of Asia, Latin America, where people have really no problem in believing that there is an evil, personal, spiritual force at work.

They'd say that it makes the best sense of human experience, and things that happen in our world that are otherwise actually very difficult to explain in terms of human behavior. And in fact, it's worth saying, people all around us, even in the skeptical West, are increasingly finding that being skeptical about the devil, about an evil spiritual force, actually makes it very difficult to explain what we see in our world.

So the writer and professor, Andrew Delbanco, is an atheist. He wrote a book, *The Death of Satan*, just describing how, as a culture, we disbelieve in the devil now.

[6 : 48] And he said this, he said, a gulf has opened up in our culture between the visibility of evil and the intellectual resources available for coping with it. He's an atheist.

But he's saying, we can't talk about evil anymore in the way that we need to. So he talks about how we don't even like to use the term evil publicly because we don't like moral absolutes.

So we'll use terms like dysfunction or disorder to describe what we would previously have called evil. And yet, because of technology and information, we are more aware of evil in our world than perhaps we've ever been.

So we see 21 Christian men taken onto a beach in Egypt and beheaded by the Islamic State for being Christians. We see interviews with the victims of horrific crimes.

You walk into Waterstones and our bookshelves are full of really dark thrillers, actually, about human behavior and the human heart. And Andrew Delbanco was just saying, we've lost the ability to talk about this properly because we won't accept that there is an evil spiritual force.

[7 : 55] Well, God's word makes sense of what we see and experience. It confirms for us that good and evil are real categories because there is a good God. And it warns us that we're not just shaped by evil within us, though we are.

We all have evil in our hearts. We're not just shaped by evil in our culture, though we are shaped by that and influenced by that. We're also shaped by evil over us, by a powerful, evil spiritual person.

And of all the things in the universe that the devil could be concerned with, he is most concerned, above everything else, with the church. Why?

Because the church is the big thing God is doing in the world today for his glory. And the devil hates that. So we need to wake up to that reality that the same grace that reconciles you to God and to one another antagonizes you to the devil.

The wonderful grace of God puts us in the devil's firing line. And just think, what would the devil want to do to a growing church like St. Silas, given what we've heard in Ephesians?

[9 : 16] What would he want to do? He wants to divide us because our unity glorifies God. We're told in Ephesians 4, make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

The devil wants to divide us, tear us apart. He would have been working on that for days, weeks, months, years in a church like St. Silas. What else?

He wants us to fall into sin because when we live godly lives, it glorifies God. So he'll tempt us to sin. And he wants us to give up on being Christians.

He wants to pick us off one by one. Do you see the massive problem here? You see, for us in the Western world, it's almost as if we'd only recognize the devil when we see something that looks like it's come straight out of Michael Jackson's thriller video or, you know, the latest horror film, Blair Witch Project, as it was remade, or Shaun of the Dead.

You know, we see some zombie with kind of blood or ink pouring out of their mouth. If we saw that, we might go, I think that's the devil. But the rest of the time, we don't see him at work.

[10 : 29] And the Bible says the devil is crafty. In verse 11, the Holy Spirit says to us, take your stand against the devil's schemes. He's cunning. How effective he can be if he knows where each of us is weakest and he works away at that.

So he gives us irrational fears, irrational doubts. Lusts for things we don't need. And we don't even notice that it's him.

So let me ask you, just to reflect, where do you think the devil is most likely to be at work today in you? In us.

Perhaps if we, there's someone we deliberately avoid at coffee time, at church, because we resent something they've done or said to us. Or when we gossip, when we talk about someone behind their back.

Or when we feel that our lives are so full on and so busy, we just haven't got the space for church to really commit wholeheartedly to our church. And we drift.

[11 : 39] So how does the devil work? If those are the things he's aiming for, how does he work? We were told in verse 16, he fires flaming arrows.

We see that on films, don't we? These ideas of archers with these flaming arrows to ignite settlements, set them ablaze. What would those flaming arrows look like from the devil? Well, the clue is in the name.

The devil means slanderer or liar. And Satan means accuser. The two main ways that the devil operates is he tempts and he accuses.

He tempts you by hiding God's goodness from you and then he accuses you by hiding God's love from you. So he tempts you by saying, God isn't really good to take those things from you.

Here are some of the ways that he will be doing that today to you. He will make sin look more attractive than it really is. He'll make God's commands seem unreasonable, too constraining, not in our best interests to follow them.

[12 : 46] He will overstress the mercy of God. You can do this. God loves you anyway. He forgives you anyway. It's his job. You can do it. He'll make you feel self-pity so that you think, I deserve this, this little sin.

You know, I'm working so hard. No one knows how hard I'm working. I'm so tired. I deserve this bit of selfish pleasure. He'll show you non-Christians living differently to God's way and doing really well, having loads of fun.

He tempts you. I don't know if any of those sound familiar to you. And then once you've sinned, the devil accuses you. He's hidden God's goodness from you so that you sin.

Now he hides God's love from you so that you think, I can't be a real Christian. If I was a real Christian, I wouldn't be struggling like this. I bet no one else in my church struggles like this.

He crushes you with guilt. How can I still be struggling with that? I can't come back to God. I can't pray. How could he forgive me for this?

[14 : 03] And we drift. It's toxic. The devil doesn't leave you with fangs in your flesh. He leaves you with lies in your heart. That's how he works. Not fangs in your flesh, lies in your heart.

But before we see how to counter that offensive, we need to remember something really important about the devil. It's that he is a defeated enemy. In Ephesians 1, we heard that God is one day going to bring everything together under the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's raised Jesus from the dead. We saw that in chapter 2. And before we put our faith in Jesus, we were under the power of the devil. But when we put our trust in Jesus, we're liberated from that.

Jesus is now at God's right hand. He's far above every ruler and authority. He is above the devil. Already we're free from the penalty of sin as Christians. We're free from the power of sin.

We don't have to sin anymore. And one day we'll be free from the presence of sin in the new creation. So the devil knows that his days are numbered. That's why Paul says, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

[15 : 11] And it's worth thinking, how does our great God defeat the devil? When the Old Testament promised the coming of the Lord Jesus, first coming and second coming, one of the pictures it uses of the Messiah coming is that he's a conquering warrior who comes to destroy the enemies of God.

And he uses that language of the armor of God. Chris used it in the prayers. In Isaiah 59, it'll come on the screen, let me just read this. Looking ahead to the future from Isaiah in 700 BC, 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. So his own arm achieved 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. According to what they have done, so will he repay wrath to his enemies and retribution to his foes.

He will repair the islands their dew. That's the future with Jesus. The devil will be defeated by this messianic warrior, God's anointed one, the risen Lord Jesus when he comes in glory.

[16 : 29] But the devil is already a defeated enemy. Why? Because of the cross. Because Jesus didn't come first time with a flaming sword in his hand.

He came to let us put nails in his hands so that he could die in our place and take on himself the penalty for our sin. So that when we attempted to doubt that God is really good, we can look at the cross and see his goodness demonstrated for us.

And when we sin and we're tempted to doubt we could be forgiven, we look at the cross and we see God isn't going to punish the same sins twice and Jesus has paid it all for me so that I am right with God.

The devil was defeated by the cross. So he was defeated by the gospel. The news that Jesus died for sins and rose again. So that's what Jesus has done to win the spiritual war.

What do we do in our day-to-day spiritual battle? We fight against the evil one the same way that Jesus did. We put on the armor of the gospel.

[17 : 38] That's our second point. Put on your gospel armor to stand firm. So the aim is to stand. Just look at how that's repeated as we read these verses. So from 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 and after you've done everything to stand.

Stand firm then. And then we have listed the different parts of the armor. Standing firm is about keeping on as a Christian. It's about walking the walk that Paul has told us to live in gospel unity, in love, in kindness.

And then Paul describes our armor, the armor that God supplies us with and foundational to it is the belt of truth buckled around your waist. It's actually like an undergarment that he wants fastened on.

Like an apron actually that a soldier would have fastened to themselves to undergird everything else just as God's truth is fundamental to everything. It's foundational. Ephesians 1.13 reminded us that it was when we heard the word of truth about Jesus that we were brought into a right relationship with God.

We have to hold on to that truth about Jesus to stand against the lies the devil tells us. And we have to speak that truth to each other to help each other in the battle.

[19 : 06] On top of that truth we get the breastplate of righteousness. The gospel truth that because we've put our faith in Jesus we stand right with God. We're covered by Jesus' righteousness.

Then we have the shoes of readiness. Verse 15 Your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. So we're ready in the battle when the enemy tries to ambush us because the gospel makes us ready and we are called to share that gospel.

We go out in readiness our feet on the march to share the news with our city about Jesus. Then we have our shield and helmet in verse 16 In addition to all this take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Take the helmet of salvation. So do you see what the armor is all about? It's all different angles on the gospel on our salvation.

If you're a Christian you already believe it but what does it look like to put it on as armor? It's about taking full ownership of it appropriating these truths telling them to ourselves meditating on them so that we write them on our hearts they get imprinted on our hearts so that just instinctively we live as though the gospel is true.

[20 : 30] we confront the accusations and the temptations of the devil by speaking the truth of the gospel to ourselves appropriating it for ourselves.

So picture Dave he's tired after a hard week at work he's on his own in his house late at night and the devil tempts him to watch pornography on the internet just a bit you deserve it no one will know no harm will be done you'll enjoy it but he fights he says to himself this is not who I am anymore I'm a child of God now and he remembers God's word Hebrews 3.13 says do not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin so he realizes the devil is lying because actually if he sins he will be hardened to God's goodness if I objectify women tonight it will be harder for me not to do that next time I'm tempted this sin is going to harm me and it's going to diminish the glory of God or Sarah is angry because she was unfairly criticized at work and she feels like she gets overlooked by people no one seems to appreciate her what she wants to do is slag people off but she says to herself you know it doesn't actually matter what anyone thinks of me anymore because God sees my sin in full and he's given me that breastplate of righteousness as a gift from him so that he looks on me as perfect so I don't need to react with resentment and anger to being wronged at work

I've got my breastplate on or Rachel she got drunk again and the next day she's feeling awful and she says to herself I can't be a real Christian I'm too sinful but she grabs her helmet of salvation and puts it on she says to herself no I know that I've been saved I just look back at the cross Jesus died for my sins I believe that I've been saved I know that I will be saved I'm not perfect now I wasn't perfect last night but I know that when Jesus comes back he'll put me right and I will be saved and when I think about it I know that I am being saved because I'm not the person that I should be and I'm not the person that I will be but I'm not the person I was I am being saved self-talk let me ask are you fighting like that in the daily skirmishes with the devil as he provokes you into sin talk to yourself appropriate the truth of the gospel and use it to reject the lies of the devil and Paul doesn't stop with the armor our third and final point this morning take hold of your gospel weapons to gain ground

I think there are two offensive weapons here prayer isn't actually mentioned as a weapon so you might disagree with me but there's such an emphasis on prayer here and it kind of flows on with this emphasis on the spirit and praying in the spirit so I think it is linked to the armor of God so you've got the sword of the spirit in verse 18 take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God and then look at the emphasis here and pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests with this in mind be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people praying about everything for everyone all the time in every different way the devil is powerful but when we get on our knees we invoke a higher authority we bring a more powerful authority in and though we pray about everything all the time the emphasis of the prayers that Paul asks for for himself here are on getting the gospel out to other people he wants to be able to preach the gospel fearlessly and clearly that should be our priority in our prayer life as well and those prayers cover and work alongside unleashing the sword of the spirit which is the word of God

I don't know if you remember but when Barack Obama was contending against Mitt Romney for presidency he was challenged that the US Navy didn't have as many ships today as it had in 1916 and Obama said this he said well Governor we also have fewer horses and bayonets because the nature of our military has changed it's a very famous line that kind of went viral and did Obama a lot of good but we could say something similar about swords couldn't we when we read about swords like a bayonet we don't really think of swords as useful things anymore they're interesting we might go to Edinburgh Castle and have a look at the swords we might have a look in a museum but in terms of actually going to war we wouldn't think of swords as particularly useful things to have with us historical interest no practical use the problem is that the devil has made churches today and Christians today think the same thing about the Bible it's historically interesting but we operate as though we think the action in the Christian life is somewhere else really and that is exactly what the devil wants us to think if you were the devil what would you do if the spirit of God is more powerful than you he is against you and he has a sword would you not whisper to Christians things like this that church takes the Bible very seriously doesn't it but what about the spirit this other church they seem to be sidelining the Bible but that's okay because maybe they're focused on the spirit if you can separate the spirit of God from the word of God the Bible which is his sword you're going to disarm him what else would you do if you were the devil today trying to move

[26 : 58] Christians away from the Bible would you not whisper to Christians in our post-modern culture you know the Bible just isn't really that helpful anymore the Bible just isn't actually very clear we can't really tell what the writers meant or maybe he'd just say the Bible is just not enough the culture was too different when it was written he wants to blunt that sword he has to get it back in its sheath so that he can tempt you and then accuse you and cause you to drift away and our response needs to be to fight fight to get the Bible into your daily devotional life with prayer Bible and prayer fight to get it into the heart of everything we do as a church let's struggle to do that it's sobering isn't it this end to Ephesians after all the highs we've heard in Ephesians of the great work that God is doing in his church it's the big thing

God is doing in the world today we're part of it and then he finishes the letter warning us wake up to the reality that you are in the midst on the front line of a nasty cosmic war you're in the trenches how will you respond St Silas well we wake up to the battle we're in so that we watch for the devil we put our armor on we use the gospel to defend ourselves and to fight to be godly and we get on the front foot so we respond to the devil with urgent sincere prayer and we get the Bible at the heart of things unleashing his sword the sword of the spirit so that the gospel advances let's pray together gracious and loving heavenly father we praise you and thank you for our armor you have equipped us in the gospel with glorious powerful transforming truth help us to put on your armor this week that we will go out from here as soldiers from their barracks armed with the gospel to live for your praise and glory amen we're just going to confess our sins we're going to say a prayer of confession where we have an opportunity to confess our sins to God perhaps to God perhaps as we