

The Armor of God

11-21-2010

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born on the earth, God scolds Israel by the prophet Isaiah. He declares that His arm is not so short that it cannot reach down and save them. His ear is not so deaf that He doesn't hear their cry for help. He knows they are suffering. He knows they need Him to rescue them. But there is a gap, a barrier between them and Him.

Isaiah 59:2 2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

The sins of the people separated them from God. He could save them. He would save them, but they refused to seek Him, to repent of their sins. We do this in our lives. We get into pain and suffering, and then we ask God why He won't help, why He looks at our trouble and does nothing to help. But we only want an end to our suffering. Our sins separate us from God. Your sins and mine exclude us from God's help. We are lost and without hope in the world because of our sins. God could reach down and save us, but our sin creates a gap between Him and us. In Isaiah, God is telling not just an individual but an entire nation: "I could save you, but your sins are in the way, and they are the gap between us!"

But God is merciful. He wants to save His people Israel from their trouble, just like He wants to save you and me from our suffering. So He looks on the nation, and searches every street and every home, seeking to find the one righteous man who can pray for the people, who can stand in the gap and seek His favor, but there is not one righteous person in their midst. All have sinned. And so, God, in His kindness, does something remarkable. He sends His own man to be a part of the people and to stand in the gap, between God and the people, and plead for them. The Messiah was to stand in the midst of the evil and undeserving people of Israel and plead their cause and rescue them from sin:

Isaiah 59:15-17 Now the LORD saw, and it was displeasing in His sight that there was no justice. 16 And He saw that there was no man, and was astonished that there was no one to intercede; then His own arm brought salvation to Him, and His righteousness upheld Him. 17 He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; And He put on garments of vengeance for clothing and wrapped Himself with zeal as a mantle

Brothers and sisters, in this picture is the gospel. God's own arm brought salvation to Him. Salvation isn't something that God's people did for themselves. Salvation is brought by God Himself, through His Righteous Son. ***When Jesus went to the cross to die for the sins of the world, He was going to war.*** This war was against the forces of evil that kept you and I bound in sin. His armor was righteousness, salvation, vengeance, and zeal. God rescues His people.

This declaration from Isaiah for the people of Israel 700 years before Jesus is also a declaration to you and me today, in 2010. God looks on you and me and sees that we are suffering and dying. His arm is long enough to end our suffering, but there is a gap between us and Him. That gap is our sins. Instead of looking for us to do what we cannot (save ourselves), He sent His Son as a warrior and as a champion to rescue us. He did this by defeating the forces of evil on the cross, and when He beat death by rising from the grave. And so, by faith, believing in Him, you gain the good that He did on your behalf. Your sin is taken away, and the arm of God reaches down and rescues you, giving you eternal life. Do you believe in Jesus? Believe in Jesus!

As we complete this series of messages from Ephesians designed to demonstrate why God has given us the mission to increase the health and size of His Church, everywhere, we must end seeing the environment in which we are to do our mission and the power have to do it. Please open your Bible to Ephesians 6:10.

TEXT: Ephesians 6:10-17

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

Christian brother and sister, fellow Harvest Church member, this is the command to us. Be strong! Why? Because we are in a fight. We have enemies seeking to destroy us as we do our mission of building the church. But we cannot let them. We must be strong.

You might say, "But I am weak." That's okay. Our strength is not our own. It belongs to God. Be strong in His might.

11 Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.

We are not putting on our armor, but God's! It is His arm that saves! We get to wear His armor; more on that armor in a moment...

We must be strong because we have to stand against the schemes of the devil. Note that the devil schemes. He is not lying in wait. He is not like a rattle snake that will strike and kill you if you happen to disturb him. Oh no. He is like a beast that tracks you down. He has the nose of a bloodhound, the strength and hunger of a polar bear, the eye of an eagle, and he has a plan that he is putting into action every day. His plan is against God, it is against God's people, it is against you, it is against the lost people of the earth. He is bent on destruction. He comes to "steal, kill, and destroy." He will not leave you alone, and he cannot be avoided. He has a plan. You must stand against him. The devil schemes, you stand against him. That is what verse 11 says. But the armor is not yours, it is the Lord's.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the

spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

No human beings are our enemies. We are not fighting against any human. It may seem that we are, because evil people do evil in the world, and fight against what is good. But we don't fight against them. Why not? Because God is the one who avenges sin, not us. He will judge wicked humanity when He sees fit and that is not for us to decide. If He wants to even the score, He can do that at any time and is just to do so. We are evil, remember, but have been redeemed by Savior. What if God had judged us for our sins? What if God's people had been fighting against us instead of trying to rescue us? We would be lost forever.

God loves people, God loves sinners. God is seeking to save sinners, not slay them. Also, we don't fight against any human because the real problem is that their minds are being blinded by the devil. The god of this world has blinded them and keeps them in the dark. He is the real enemy. He is seeking to kill all humans and keep all people from the God who can save them. He wants all humans dead. He hates us all. He wants us all in sin. He hates God and he hates us because we are made in God's image.

There are invisible evil forces behind all the wickedness in this world. Although the guilt falls on man for his sins, the temptations to wickedness, the lies, the wars, the rapes, the killings, all these things are encouraged and motivated in the invisible realm by evil forces. These demonic forces are the enemy. They are fighting you. You cannot avoid this fight. It is happening. You are a soldier, you are in a war.

13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.

Here is the showdown. We are to take up the whole armor of God so that we might fight. Again, this is not our armor, but God's. The devil is greater than us if we are left to our own devices. Indeed, he was once our ruler. But the Savior has rescued us. He now says, "Take up my armor! Stand and fight!" Our "withstanding" in the evil day is not to be passive. You must face evil down. You must challenge the devil's forces.

In the cowboy movies, the evil gunfighter goes into town and everyone avoids him, they slink away, they run. They don't stand against him. The hero does though. John Wayne or Clint Eastwood don't back down when the bad man comes to town. When everyone else cowers, they turn their face to the evil man, throw back their coat, and show that they have a gun, and they are ready to use it. This is the call given to you. "Stand firm" says Paul. The meaning here is this: Established and immovable. The goal is to be established, to stand firm against evil and not move at all. How do you make something stay in one place over time? It's hard to do. The Christian, the Church, is to do this. Set up, stand, and don't move, don't back down, don't go away.

Everything on the earth can be shaken. Everything can be moved and there is no thing established which cannot be taken down. The twin towers of commerce in NYC are gone, fallen to the ground. The empires of the Romans, the Japanese, the Germans, and all the rest have come and gone. It is hard to establish things immovably on this earth. But ***God has established His church and it is to stand throughout all generations. When nations rise and fall, though mountains crumble to the sea, the church is not to move.***

As a local church we are to be like a large rock placed in someone's front yard with a crane. It might not have been there yesterday, but now that it is here, no one in the neighborhood is going to be able to move it. Likewise, the local church is to stand against all the power of the devil and not flinch, not move. Unmoved, she is to stare evil in the eye and say, "I'm not done. I will slay you."

14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. 16 In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; 17 and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,

Here is the armor of God. We have a belt, we have a breastplate, we have shoes, we have a shield, we have a helmet, and we have sword. The armor mentioned in verses 14 and 15, and the helmet of verse 17 is taken from Isaiah 59 and 52. Paul is calling us to look back to the salvation of Israel. This isn't your armor; it is the armor of the Savior of Israel, the One who stood in the gap when sin separated God's people from Him.

The weapons of our warfare then are these: "Truth, Righteousness, the Gospel of Peace, Faith, Salvation, and the Word of God."

These weapons have several qualities to them that we should note. First, we have them all because we have Jesus. None of these weapons are withheld from us. We are NOT unprotected from Satan. Never fear the devil. Never fear the demons. Never fear the forces of evil. Never fear the designs of evil men. Jesus has fully equipped us. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life!" Jesus is the truth. He said that you, His children, would know the truth and the truth would make you free. He has given you His righteousness as a gift. The Bible says, "He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God." The Gospel of peace is what saves us. We are saved by grace through Faith, and that not of ourselves. We have salvation. We have the word of God. We are set up. Every child of God is given the full arsenal of weapons. We have our armor, our weapons, we are locked and loaded. There are no exceptions. Not a one of us is unequipped for the war zone we live in. ***If we lose battles it is because we're not fighting, not because we haven't been equipped.***

Second, these weapons are effective. Look at our sword; it is the word of God. The Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. It never returns void! It is powerful and potent and always accomplishes what God intends! We have a shield of faith which protects against all the attacks of the devil. With the smallest amount of faith, it is so potent, that we can toss trees into the sea and move mountains. We don't need much faith, it is stronger than uranium.

"I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." The power of the weapons we wield can take sinners locked in the trap of Satan, bound with the chains of sin, and set them free. When we preach the good news of the gospel, Satan is set on the run. When we say, "Christ died for sinners," he cringes.

I know lots of people who fall into the trap of being afraid of devils and of Satan. They are spooked by everything. I know a friend who was worried because someone had a little Buddha statue as a decoration. He was worried that demonic power came into the house on that little statue. So what if it had. In the name of Jesus, we have power over all demonic forces. ***When we preach Christ Crucified, Christ buried, Christ raised, Christ coming again, we have power over all the forces of evil!*** We have to stop cowering in fear. One of the devil's favorite lies is that he is going to get you and you won't be able to stop him. Wrong! All authority in heaven and earth has been given to you!

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,

We have the power, by the name of Christ, by the gospel, by the righteousness which is ours by faith, to wreak absolute havoc in the devil's sandbox! He has no power over us. When the gospel comes, the devil runs!

Finally, ***these weapons are good, giving life to the earth (destructive only to the forces of evil) –there is never collateral damage.*** When you fire off human weapons, like bombs and bullets, you can be successful in destroying human enemies. But there is always collateral damage in war. You burn down buildings and the innocent die accidentally. Not so with the weapons we use. They slay the evil forces, but they never harm mankind. The weapons we wield bring the dead to life. They take those who are walking in darkness and bring light. They heal the broken hearted. They bring spring time, not winter. They bring life, not death. The world is dead and God is bringing the dead to life. He has equipped us to be soldiers in the war to build life, not to destroy.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. –John 10:10

I want to end this sermon with a picture of our Savior and His power. Jesus came near a town and there was a man bound in chains. He was there because he was tormented by many demons. He was not in his right mind. No human being could help him. Everyone feared him. Jesus did not. He approached him, and the demons within the man screamed in fear, asking Jesus if he had come to torment them before the end of time. Jesus told them, “get out.” They got out. The man was free. Jesus had the power to cast out demons. He had the power to heal. Why? Because sickness is caused by evil, by our fallen self, and Jesus has authority over demons. He has authority over evil. And He has given all of His armor and all of His weapons to you.

Luke 10:18-20 18 and he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. 20 Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

When God saved you, He drafted you into the army of light, the army of life, the army of faith. He gave you armor that will protect you from the enemy's attacks, he gave you weapons that will slay the devil and set his prisoners free. This is a war, you are a soldier, and your name is written in the Lamb's book of life. Rejoice, stay ready for battle, stand firm.