

## Armor of God: The Full Armor

April 7, 2024

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When I say, "Christ has risen!" you respond, "Christ has risen indeed!"

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Good morning, Church. Welcome to the second Sunday of Easter. Traditionally, the second Sunday of Easter is Holy Hilarity Sunday. In the ancient church they thought that the resurrection was the greatest "gotcha" the world had ever seen. The stone was rolled away, not so Jesus could get out, but so that we could get in. And the devil could see: "You thought you had Me. Gotcha!"

Back in August when we were planning today's service, knowing this was Holy Hilarity Sunday, we contemplated doing something along those lines. But as we looked at 2024 and what was going on then and what the possibilities were for this year, we weren't feeling it. And we decided instead what we would do is we would talk about the tools, the gifts, the armor, if you will, that God gives us to face tragedies and temptations and life. And so today we begin an 8-part series on the armor of God. I want to read a passage of scripture taken from Ephesians, chapter 6 beginning with verse 10. Paul is writing.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can 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 armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all of this, take the shield of faith, which will help you extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 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 saints.

May God bless the reading of His Word.

There's nothing funny about experiencing hardships, trials, tragedies, and temptations of any kind. Our world is full of crisis and issues. And I don't know about you, but every morning I look into the face of the person that causes me the most problems. (No, it's not my wife!) I look in the mirror (how about that?) and see the person that causes most of my issues. But there are also the issues that are imposed on us by the actions of others. There are world events and life events. And mingled in among all of those, we encounter evil in the world. And we must be prepared. And the time to prepare is before it happens, before you need it. We must be persistent and consistent in preparing ourselves to meet the challenges of life. Today we begin an 8-part series on the armor

of God, that allows us to stand firm in the face of hardship, in the face of tragedy, in the face of the crisis that we will face. Today we will explore why it is important to put on the full armor of God. In the next few weeks, we'll be looking at the individual pieces of armor, the individual tools that God gives us to help us with the struggles of life. In the coming weeks, we'll explore the God-given tools to help face life.

But first, a look at the book of Ephesians itself. Ephesians, if you're not intimately familiar with that book, is one of Paul's most important works. Paul wrote Ephesians literally chained to a guard in a prison cell. His future was tenuous at best. He had spent a lot of his life and a lot of his ministry in and around Ephesus in Asia Minor, and he was writing the book of Ephesians to give them last instructions in case he didn't make it. In Ephesians you will find great sweeping principles that apply to many of the circumstances of life. Paul knew that the world they lived in, in Asia Minor where this book was going to be read, was full of hardships and troubles and trials and tribulations and temptations, and he knew that the church was not exempt. They were going to be persecuted, and they were going to live in a harsh world. Does that sound familiar? He knew they would need tools to help get them through. Paul was quite literally chained at the wrist to a Roman soldier. The Roman soldier would have had a clasp on his arm; Paul would have had a clasp on his arm; and there would have been a length of chain between them. How would you have liked to have been a non-Christian chained to Paul? But, as he contemplated the gentleman he was chained to, he saw a readymade illustration. (I'm going to buy a T-shirt that says: "Be cautious. You're approaching a pastor. Anything you say or do can be used as a sermon illustration!")

And Paul saw what he needed to talk to his people, the people that he loved, about the tools God provides to help us cope with life. He begins by saying, "Finally, brothers and sisters, be strong in the Lord and the power of His might." Paul is wrapping up this beautiful letter and he is saying, "If you haven't heard anything I've said to this point, listen to me." Their world was a scary place. Life was cheap, and the world was harsh. In addition to that, they saw spirits behind everything: evil spirits, good spirits, benign spirits. They saw spirits behind everything, and the words that Paul uses in this passage are different classifications of spirits they believed existed in that world. Now, we don't have time to get into that today, but whatever you believe about the spirit world, I don't believe there's anyone here that does not believe that we encounter evil in this world. And we must have God's strength to fight it. The strength that we have does not come from us. It comes from God. And no one is exempt. Just because you are a Christian doesn't mean you are exempt from temptation, exempt from crisis, exempt from tragedy. Life happens, y'all. There's no privileged status. In fact of the matter, I would contend if you're trying to get your life together, if you're trying to work for the kingdom, if you are trying to do the right thing, you are going to run into evil. You're going to have troubles. You're going to have problems. We have a Southern saying: "The only time you run into the devil is when the two of you are going in opposite directions." When you are trying do the right thing, when you are trying to get your life on track, you are going to face troubles, trials, and temptations. Christian strength comes from the Lord, comes from God, not our own strength. Literally, in the Greek, it doesn't say, "Be strong." It says, "Be made strong. Be made strong." Thank goodness that we don't have to depend on our own strength to stand, but God gives us His strength. But we must be intentional about putting that on. "Be made strong in God's strength." You don't have to depend on your own strength.

Paul goes on to say, "Put on the full armor of God." Leaving part of it off leaves you vulnerable. Now, I'm going to make a statement here in just a moment. Don't throw anything at me! And if you don't agree with me, eventually you will! (That is so arrogant, it's supposed to be funny! I think you will; let's put it that way.) We all have weaknesses. Can you agree with that? Okay, we all have weaknesses. They are different. And at those points we are vulnerable. It's not a sin to have a weakness. Hear me: It's not a sin to have a weakness; it is a sin not to acknowledge it and take extra steps to protect it. Do you hear me? We all have our weak points. We all have our personal temptations, and they are different. And that, in and of itself, is not a sin. It is, however, a sin not to acknowledge it and take extra care to protect it. That's where the sin comes in. And it's arrogance on our part not to protect our strengths. I have always believed that our greatest gifts come with an angel and a demon. We think that because we are strong in this area or that area, we don't have to guard against that area or this area. And then evil can attack us in those places. Put on the full armor of God. Why? So that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. You see, you're not going to be attacked where you're the strongest. And you're not going to be attacked when you are strong in Christ. You're going to be attacked at your weakest point, at your weakest moment. And the time to prepare for that is before it happens. It is important to maintain our readiness. This must be a constant: We must be consistent and persistent about our training.

Lastly, Paul says, "Take your stand against the devil's schemes, because our struggle is not against flesh and blood." Listen carefully: People are not your enemy. Our enemy is evil. Now, I have to be honest and say people may be the agent through whom evil comes. But our war is not against people. We must put on God's armor and use God's strength. You never know when a problem may come. You never know when a crisis may happen. You never know when a phone call is going to turn your world upside down. You never know. Most of us have experienced that, and if you haven't, chances are you will. You get a phone call that changes your world. You get a message that changes your life. You get a doctor's visit that changes everything. And before that happens, we must prepare.

Put on the full armor of God. Just because you are a Christian doesn't mean you are exempt. But here's the good news: The good news is that God gives us the tools we need to stand. God gives us the tools we need to overcome. God gives us the tools we need to face crisis. God gives us the tools we need to overcome evil in our world. That is our great advantage. God gives us the armor we need to live life and combat evil in whatever form it takes.

Let us pray. So, in the quiet of this moment, I want you to commit to learning the tools God provides to overcome evil, to overcome temptation, to face crisis, to face tragedy, to face life. Would you make that commitment this morning?

Hear our prayers, O Lord. First of all, God, we are so grateful we do not have to face the temptations and the crisis of life on our own. You stand with us. And Your power is sufficient for the moment. And remind us, also, Lord, that we have one another to help. We do not stand by ourselves. We do not stand alone. But we stand with You and with one another. In Christ's name, amen.