

Sunday 15th November 2020
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Ephesians 6:10 – 20
Theme: “Don’t be a Christian streaker”
“Put on the whole armour of God!”

Introduction:

We haven’t seen too many streakers at the footy or the cricket recently, *I’m glad to say....* Although, the Grand Final between Geelong and Richmond had a couple of streakers, *I seem to remember....* And we’ll probably have a streaker or two or three if Test cricket comes to Adelaide.

Streakers are people who run across the cricket ground with no clothes on. I guess that they do it because of alcohol intoxication, or because of a bet, or because of peer pressure....

If you run around on a cricket ground or wherever with no clothes on, you are completely vulnerable. You have nothing to protect you from being hurt by the rays of the sun, by the stings of the insects, or by the jagged edges of trees or rocks, or whatever.

You need clothes, and a hat, and shoes to protect you.

Paul is making a similar point in our Bible reading for today, in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus. He is telling them to put on the full armour of God so that they won’t be hurt by the assaults of Satan on their faith..

This morning, I want to go through what Paul writes here about putting on the whole armour of God. I want us to see for ourselves the armour that God gives us to protect us from the assaults of the Devil....

Part 1: The enemy we face (vv. 10 - 12)

Let’s listen to what Paul says in the first few verses, as he tells us why we should put on the whole armour of God. Paul writes:

Finally, built up your strength in union with the Lord and by means of his mighty power. Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil’s evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age (Eph. 6:10-12).

Why should we put on the armour that God gives us? So that we “will be able to stand up against the Devil’s evil tricks”. Can I ask you: “Do you believe in

the Devil, in Satan, and in the world of the demonic?" I do!

I know that there are many these days who scoff at the existence of the Devil and the realm of the demonic, *even Christians*. But I believe in the existence of Satan and the world of the demonic....

Why? Well, first and foremost because Jesus, God's Son, spoke about the reality of Satan and the world of the demonic.

He did so again and again in his preaching and his teaching, and in his parables.... And he openly fought against "the kingdom of darkness" in his miracles of exorcism: he expelled demons from those who were demon possessed, saying things to evil spirits like:

"Be quiet, and come out of the man!" (*Mk 1:25*)

Mark tells us that when Jesus said this to a man possessed by an evil spirit:

The evil spirit shook the man hard, gave a loud scream, and came out of him. The people were all so amazed that they stared saying to one another, "What is this? Is this some kind of new teaching? This man has authority to give order to the evil spirits, and they obey him!" (*Mark 1:26-27; cf. Matt. 4:1-11; 13:18-23, 37-43; Mark 3:21-30; M. Green, I believe in Satan's Downfall, p. 26-27*).

So I believe in the existence of Satan and the world of the demonic principally because Jesus, *God's Son*, spoke about their reality, and fought "the Kingdom of darkness".

As well, all my reading and my personal experience backs up the reality of this realm. Again and again, I've read about and heard about people who have opened themselves up to evil, and who have done terrible things as a result....

And I experienced firsthand this happening during my vicarage here in Adelaide *back in the early 1980's*, when I undertook a course in Counselling at the Hillcrest Psychiatric hospital, *which has since been disbanded*: many of the people I visited in Hillcrest had involved themselves with occult and some way, and opened themselves up to Satan and the demonic....

Yes, there is no doubt in my mind that Satan and the world of the demonic exist.

And Paul here in our Bible reading is emphasising this to the Christians in Ephesus. He writes to them:

Put on all the armour that God gives you, so that you will be able to stand up against the Devil's evil tricks. For we are not fighting against human beings (*lit. "against flesh and blood"*), but against the wicked spiritual forces in the heavenly world, the rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers of this dark age (*Eph. 6:11-12*).

Paul talks about the forces of Satan as being powerful, wicked, and cunning (*cf. Stott, Ephesians, p.263-265*). Satan's aim is to lead us away from our trust in God, and our trust in Jesus as our Saviour, and lead us to "destruction", *to life with him in a hellish existence, both now and in eternity.*

There's a little story that reminds us of Satan's aim for us. It's a story that was told originally by the celebrated eighteenth century preacher, Rowland Hill. He relates that:

He was walking down the street one day when he saw a whole lot of pigs following a man. "This", said Hill, "excited my curiosity so much that I decided to follow them to see where they were going. I followed them, and to my great surprise I saw them follow him to the slaughter house.

I said to the man, 'My friend, how did you induce the pigs to follow you here?' He replied, 'I had a basket of beans under my arm, and I dropped a few as I came along, and so they followed me'" (*M. Green, p. 63-64*).

You know, that is precisely Satan's strategy, *or one of his strategies*. He tries to lure us further and further away from Jesus as our Saviour, onwards towards "destruction", *towards the slaughter-house, so to speak.*

Satan is the great "accuser". In the Bible, he is portrayed as being the adversary of God, the one who accuses God's people (*Job 1:6-12; Rev. 12:10*). Satan aims to lead us into sin, and when we sin, he accuses us and says in effect:

"Now, you've done it! Now you've gone too far. How can you expect God to forgive you now!? Don't worry about God! Eat, drink, and be merry, and enjoy yourself".

Satan aims to lead us away from Jesus as our Saviour, away to "destruction" (*cf. John 3:16; 2 Thess. 1:9*).

Part 2: The armour of God (vv. 13-17)

Paul goes on to write:

So put on God's armour now! Then when the evil day comes, you will be able to resist the enemy's attacks; and after fighting to the end, you will still hold your ground.

So stand ready, with truth as a belt tight around your waist, with righteousness as your breastplate, and as your shoes the gospel of peace. At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One. And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives (*Eph. 6:13-17*).

Paul is telling the Christians in Ephesus, to whom he is writing, *and us too today*, that it is vitally important that we put on all the armour, *all the clothes*, that God has given to us to protect us as His children. God hasn't left us on our own to fight Satan! We are His children, and he gives us a whole lot of armour to protect us and to defend us.

He loves us, *as any good father loves his children*, and so he gives us equipment with which we can protect ourselves and defend ourselves, *so that we can "stand firm" in our faith (v. 11, 13bc, 14)*.

Let's have a quick, close look at this armour that God gives us to defend ourselves against Satan and the realm of the demonic. Paul mentions six pieces of equipment that God gives to us for our defence. Paul was very familiar with the Roman soldiers of his day, and he likens the equipment that God gives us to defend ourselves as His children with the equipment that a Roman soldier used to defend himself. As I said, Paul mentions six pieces of equipment that God gives us. See if you can remember them, by relating them to the pieces of equipment of a Roman soldier:

1) "Truth as a belt tight around your waist"

The first item of equipment that God gives to us, with which we can defend ourselves from Satan's attacks is "truth". As God's children, we have the truth of Jesus. Jesus said: "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life..." (*John 14:6; cf. 8:31-36; Eph. 4:21; 5:6*).

Through listening to Jesus, we know the truth about God, about this world, about God's forgiveness through Jesus' suffering and death for us on a cross, about where we are headed, and so on.

This "truth", Paul says, holds us together, like a soldier's belt held his tunic and his sword holder tightly in place. One commentator says about the belt:

Usually made of leather, a soldier's belt belonged rather to his underwear than his armour. Yet it was essential. It gathered his tunic together and also held his sword. It ensured that he was unimpeded when marching. As he buckled it on, it gave him a sense of hidden strength and confidence. Belts and braces still do (*Stott, p. 277*).

This "truth" that we know, then, through Jesus, holds us together, *like a belt on your jeans or the old fashioned braces on your pants*, as we fight against the schemes of Satan. It is our foundation garment, if you like, in our fight with Satan (*cf. a woman's corset or girdle*).

2) "Righteousness as your breastplate"

The next item of equipment that God gives to us, with which we can defend

ourselves from Satan's attacks is "righteousness". That's a term that is equivalent to "being justified" and translated often in the Good News Bible as "being right with God". We are "righteous", that is "right with God", Paul tells us over and over again in his letters, by trusting in Jesus as our Saviour.

When we trust in Jesus as our Saviour, *and accept all that Jesus did for us on the cross*, then we are "righteous": we are "right with God", we are forgiven.

Let me share with you a few verses from Paul's letters that remind us of this:
***"For we conclude that a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus, and not by doing what the Law commands"** (*Rom. 3:28; cf. v. 22, 26*).

***"Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"** (*Rom. 5:1*).

***"There is no condemnation now for those who live in union with Christ Jesus"** (*Rom. 8:1*).

There is no greater protection from the accusations of Satan with regard to our "sins" than the "righteousness of God" which is ours as we trust in Jesus as our Saviour. We are "right with God", *we are God's forgiven children*, as long as we cling to Jesus as our Saviour.

Paul likens the "righteousness" that God gives us to that of a soldier's breastplate. The soldier's breastplate was made of metal or chain, it covered his vital organs at the front, and it was a his most basic protection against harm. In the same way, our "righteousness", *our being right with God*, is our most basic protection against Satan's attacks.

3) "as your shoes the gospel of peace"

The next item of equipment that God gives to us, as part of our defense against Satan, is "the gospel of peace". Paul likens "gospel of peace" to a soldier's sandal, or "half-boot".

The Roman soldier wore these "half-boots".

They were made of leather, left the toes free, had heavy studded soles, and were tied to the ankles and shins by more or less ornamental straps. These boots equipped the soldier for long marches, gave him a solid stance, and prevented his foot from sliding (*Stott, p. 279; cf. Barth, Ephesians 2:796*).

Paul is saying that "the gospel of peace" is like these boots or sandals that a Roman soldier wore. The good news of peace of with God through Jesus as our Saviour gives us, *who are Christians*, firmness and a steadiness as we fight Satan, like the boots of a Roman soldier gave him firmness and steadiness as he fought his battles.

By the way, some translations, like the Good News Bible, emphasise these boots equip us to go out and preach “the gospel of peace”. I don’t think that that’s the main thought here. I like the New English Bible translation: **“Let the shoes on your feet be the gospel of peace, to give you firm footing”** (*NEB; cf. Stott, p. 280*).

All the items of “the armour of God” are given to us by God to protect us and to defend us against the wiles of Satan. And the shoes which are “the gospel of peace” are no exception.

4) “faith as a shield”

The fourth item of equipment that God gives to us, with which to defend ourselves from Satan, is “faith”, which Paul likens to that of a Roman soldier’s shield. Paul writes:

At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One.

The shield that Paul has in mind is no little shield, but the huge shield that Roman soldiers used to carry (*hold up left arm with an imaginary shield on it*). This shield measured some 1.2 metres by 0.75 metres, and so it covered the whole person. It consisted of two layers of wood glued together and covered first with linen and then with animal skin; it was bound together with iron above and below. So you can see that such a shield would be ‘pretty’ valuable if arrows *dipped in pitch or tar and set alight* were fired at you.

This is the picture that Paul wants us to have in mind as he speaks of our “faith” as a shield against “the burning arrows shot by the Evil One”, *the burning arrows of temptations like pride, and lust, and greed, and doubt, and disobedience, and fear, to name just a few of the flaming arrows that Satan sends our way.*

Our faith in God, and in His promises to be with us and give us strength in time of temptation, shieldS us from the flaming arrows of temptation that come our way. That’s not to say, of course, that some don’t get through. But even if they do, we have the breastplate of our righteousness. Even if we give into temptation and sin, we know that we are right with God through our faith in Jesus, and that as we cry out to God for forgiveness, we are forgiven for Jesus’ sake.

5) “the helmet of salvation”

The fifth item of equipment that God gives to us, with which to defend ourselves from Satan, is “the helmet of salvation”. I think that Paul has in mind here “our *certain* hope of salvation”. In his first letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, this is exactly what he says.

There he says:

Put on...our hope of salvation as a helmet (1 Thess. 5:8).

We can continue on, and fight whatever Satan throws at us, *be it sickness, doubt, temptation, depression, the death of a loved one, or whatever*, because we know where we are headed. We are headed for home to be with God, and our Lord Jesus, and with all God's people in "heaven". This is our certain hope, and this is like a helmet on our head....

6) "the word of God as the sword..."

The sixth and final item of equipment that God gives to us, with which to defend ourselves from Satan, is "the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives you. Paul likens the word of God to the short sword the Roman soldier wielded to defend himself with. We can defend ourselves from Satan's temptations by quoting the word of God at him.

That's what Jesus did when he was tempted by Satan. Remember that again and again he quoted God's word in the Old Testament, in order to defend himself from Satan's temptation. For example, when Jesus was tempted by Satan to turn the stones in the desert into bread, so he could have something to eat, Jesus answered:

"The scripture says, 'Man cannot live on bread alone, but needs every word that God speaks'" (Matt. 4:4; cf. Deut. 8:3).

And this is what we can do, too, when we are tempted by Satan. We can wield the sword of the word of God at Satan. When he tempts us, for example, with lust to indulge in what the Bible calls "immorality", we can quote Scripture and Paul's words:

"Flee immorality. Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body, but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body..." (1 Cor. 6:18).

Or when he tempts us to greed, we can quote Jesus' words:

"Watch out and guard yourselves from every kind of greed; because a person's true life is not made up of the things he owns, no matter how rich he may be" (Luke 12:15).

And Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount:

"You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24).

But to be able to use the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, to resist temptation we have to know God's word. We have to have read it, and to know it, and even to be able to quote it from memory. At the very least, we have to know where to look for certain passages.

A famous evangelist, a pastor by the name of Moody, once described a mutilated Bible as “a broken sword”. By that I guess he meant that a person’s Bible that was allowed to go to rack and ruin was a Bible that wasn’t valued highly.

But paraphrasing him, I’d say that a new, unused Bible on a shelf is “a broken sword”.

It is a sword that a child of God is not using, because he or she is not reading his or her Bible....

Part 3: Do all this in prayer (vv. 18-20)

And finishing off, Paul says that as we fight Satan using the armour that God gives us, we should fight him by praying for ourself and one another constantly.

Listen to what Paul says:

“Do all this in prayer, asking for God’s help. Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. For this reason keep alert and never give up; pray always for all God’s people. And pray also for me...” (v. 18-20).

Prayer for one’s self and for one another and for others is to be part of our daily fight against Satan....

Conclusion:

So don’t be Christian streakers, then! Don’t run anywhere without the clothes that God gives you, *the armour that He gives you.*

Can you remember the six pieces of armour that God gives you? Think of the six pieces of equipment that a Roman soldier wore....

Let me read to you again Paul’s words in our text and see how many pieces that you remember out of the six pieces of equipment that God gives us:

So stand ready, with truth as a belt tight around your waist, with righteousness as your breastplate, and as your shoes the gospel of peace. At all times carry faith as a shield; for with it you will be able to put out all the burning arrows shot by the Evil One. And accept salvation as a helmet, and the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives (Eph. 6:14-17).

You are not on your own as you fight temptation and the wiles of Satan. God has given you a solid defense against Satan. And at all times, pray for God’s help for yourself and for one another...