



The Church of England
in Essex and East London

Diocese of Chelmsford

The whole armour of God

A sermon podcast for

25 August 2024

by

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Ephesians 6:10-20

I don't mind admitting that life has been a bit of a struggle for me over the past year or so. You may or may not know that I was diagnosed with a form of Blood Cancer last year and have been through many sessions of chemotherapy and a Stem Cell Transplant, with a real hit to my fitness and ability to work.

A lot of people watching this will have had their own struggles, whether with health or relationships, finance, work, worries about the future, or a host of other possibilities. The word 'host' can mean an army, of course, and it can certainly feel at times as though we are under attack from an army of malign forces determined to bring us down.

If that's true of us, it was equally true for the Christians in Ephesus to whom Paul was writing in Ephesians 6. The army that they would have known was, of course, the Roman army, and so Paul uses the armour worn by a Roman soldier as an illustration of how to respond when life feels like a battle.

The first thing to notice is that he *doesn't* say just 'be strong!' What he says is 'be strong *in the Lord* and in the strength *of his power*.'

Whatever you are going through, you are not alone and you don't have to rely on your own strength. God is with you and it is in him that you will find what the writer of the hymn *Great is thy faithfulness* called 'strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow'.

Then Paul describes the means by which followers of Jesus can equip ourselves to face that challenges of life, 'the whole armour of God', in terms that anyone living in the Roman Empire would have understood – not to enable them to wage a physical battle against the Romans but to enable them and us, when we struggle, to stand firm.

The first item is the belt of truth. In our own time, we see so many taken in by misinformation, disinformation and lies that do so much harm. So, it is important to remind ourselves about the truth of who God is, of his love for us and of how we are to live our lives in the light of that love. 'God so LOVED the world that he gave his only-begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life'. That's the fundamental truth that a life of faith is built upon.

The second is the breastplate of righteousness. I want to suggest that that's not *our* righteousness – we are not to be self-righteous – but it's the righteousness of Christ that we put on as forgiven sinners. 'If we say that we are without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' So it's not *self-righteousness* that will be our breastplate in our struggles, but the assurance that we are forgiven sinners, loved by God.

For shoes, Paul tells us to 'put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the Gospel of peace'. Each of us is unique, of course, in our own circumstances. You will know best how to live out the Gospel of peace in your own life, in your words and in your actions. Just don't hang about. Actively do those things that enable you to live your life in that way.

Then there's the shield of faith. I love the image of using the shield of faith to fend off the 'flaming arrows of the evil one'. We all have our doubts, whether they come from our own thoughts or from things that others say or do to us. Rather than allowing them to wound us, we can remind ourselves daily about the faith and the hope that is within us. God *does* know me and love me and I *can* put my trust in him.

Finally, Paul tells us to take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. What is the helmet of salvation? The Arabic version of that phrase is ‘the helmet of the Saviour’ – in other words, we put on Christ himself. Christ protects our heads, and therefore our whole being, from spiritual death. We are saved by Christ and it is in Christ that we have our hope. Indeed, elsewhere, Paul writes of putting on the *hope* of salvation as a helmet, arguing that we need to refresh our memory each day of God’s assurance of his love for us, and the knowledge that the ultimate victory is his – and ours as his people.

You might have noticed that the sword of the Spirit is the only weapon in our armoury. Everything else so far has been defensive. But the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, is essential to our success in the life of faith. This is about reading God’s Word and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide us in our understanding and in our actions so that we live out his will for our lives. No wonder Paul tells Ephesian Christians to ‘pray in the Spirit at all times’, to keep alert, to pray for others and to pray for him.

So, brothers and sisters, whatever the challenges you are facing today, let me encourage you to ‘put on the whole armour of God’ as Paul puts it. Success is not guaranteed in the world’s terms. When Paul wrote this letter, he was probably a prisoner; he called himself ‘an ambassador in chains’. There will be times when we are brokenhearted, ‘crushed in spirit’, as the Psalmist puts it. But for us who abide in Christ, the promise of Jesus is that in the battles of life the ultimate victory is ours in him. Christ is with us, both in this life and in eternity.

Almighty God

You search us and know us:

May we rely on you in strength

and rest on you in weakness,

now and all our days;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.