

The Armor of God Pt 2

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 6. We are continuing to look at the armor of God this morning and the title of the message is "The Armor of God Part 2." We started last week looking specifically at this and this has resulted out of the larger series we've been doing on Ezra/Nehemiah in which in the book of Ezra/Nehemiah the Old Testament people of God were building the walls of Jerusalem and as they were building the walls of Jerusalem they experienced in Nehemiah 4 intense opposition, intense opposition to the work. There were an array of enemies that were determined to stop them from building the wall, from restoring the city of Jerusalem, the place where God's people dwelt and the place where his temple was, the place where they had rebuilt the temple and the worship of God was at stake. And so we had noted that we had seen in that fourth chapter of Nehemiah that if we build, we must fight, that that's essentially the message of that chapter. We build, we fight. We build the walls of Jerusalem, we must be prepared to fight. They had to take up in their hand along with the trowel to build the walls, they had to take up the sword so that they would be ready to build.

If you're going to build, you're going to be attacked and we've noted this is really true for Christians, that the application of Nehemiah 4 to us today as Christians in the 21st century is that we build the body of Christ, we are called to build the body of Christ, we're called to build the spiritual Jerusalem which is the church and that means building one another up in the things of God, to seek our own personal holiness. That's building the walls of Jerusalem, the separation from the world that God is looking for us to manifest. Not just separation from the world but separation unto Christ that our hearts would be fully his. And as we help each other to pursue that, we're building and so that's what we're called to do, we're called to build then we are also going to experience opposition.

The New Testament makes this abundantly clear that when you build, you must be prepared to fight. There is an enemy who hates to see us build. The enemy of our souls hates to see you pursue personal holiness and he will fight against you as you do that. There is an enemy of our souls who hates to see you help other brothers and sisters to pursue holiness, to walk with Christ, and he will fervently oppose every attempt you make. This is why the New Testament, the imagery of warfare is a prominent image in the New Testament. In fact, hold your place in Ephesians 6, we're gonna read that, that's our main text this morning but you might just turn over a few pages toward the back of

your Bible to 1 Timothy 6:12 and I want to show you some passages that show that from the New Testament perspective we are at war.

To be a Christian is to be at war and you see this 1 Timothy 6:12. Paul exhorts the young pastor Timothy, he says, "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called." Fight the good fight of faith. This theme continues through Paul's letters to Timothy.

In 2 Timothy, the next letter he writes, turn over a page, 2 Timothy 2:3-4 Paul encourages this young pastor, this young believer, this young man of God, "Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier." To be a Christian is to be a soldier.

And he ends that letter, chapter 4, verse 7, Paul then tells Timothy he knows that the time of his departure from this life is at hand and he says in verse 7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith," so that he saw his life as a fight and that we are to see our lives and Timothy was to see his life as a fight and encourage the Christians that he ministered to to see that, and so that there is this spiritual warfare that we are engaged in.

Another example of this is the whole idea of the armor of God, if you're in a warfare, what we're going to see in Ephesians 6, in a moment we're gonna read, is you take up the whole armor of God, take up the full armor because you're in a warfare. At war you want to put on all of your armor. You don't want to leave behind your helmet or your breastplate. You want all of the armor. Well, this image is another image that's repeated a number of times in the New Testament. Romans 13:12 Paul writes to the Roman believers, "The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light." Put on your armor, he says. Lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on your armor. We're at war.

Interestingly enough as you read on down, he says in verse 13, "Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy." See, he said lay aside the deeds of darkness and verse 13 basically expounds upon that. Lay aside these deeds. He said put on the armor of light and verse 14 is going to expound upon what it means to put on the armor of light. Look what he says, verse 14. After you lay aside these deeds, you behave properly, you don't carouse, get involved in carousing and drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, sensuality, strife and jealousy, but what does it mean to put on the armor of light? "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." To put on the armor is to put on Christ.

That's also echoed in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians 5:8. He says to them, he exhorts them, "But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation." You see, it was very natural to Paul to go to military, the military metaphor because he realized and he wanted his people to whom he was writing to understand that to be a Christian is to be at war. To be a

Christian is to be at war and we're going to see that as we read in a moment from Ephesians 6 and, of course, our warfare is a spiritual warfare. It's not against flesh and blood, it's against the enemy of our souls and his kingdom of darkness. It is against the world system of thought, ungodly thought. Not the people in the world but the world system. It is against sin in our own flesh. The world, the flesh and the devil, that is the spiritual warfare that we fight against and when we come to experience conflict with people, we are to remember that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but that it really is a spiritual struggle.

So let's read Ephesians 6:10-18, the armor of God.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we ask that You would now help us through the power of Your word and the ministry of Your Spirit to be strong in the Lord. We want to be people who are equipped for the war in which we find ourselves. Lord, help us be sober-minded, to think clearly and rightly about our circumstances and about our lives, and help us, Lord, in thinking soberly and clearly about the circumstances around us, help us to think soberly and rightly about the preciousness of Christ, that He is truly the supreme treasure our heart longs for and that to be in His presence is the aim of why we were made. Help us long for heaven and even as we long for heaven, help us to fight for Your kingdom and that others might be delivered from darkness into the hope of eternal life in Your presence. Father, be glorified in this time we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the armor of God and we're looking today at the next piece of armor. We started last time, we said, we emphasized as Paul did last time that we're to put on the full armor of God. He says that twice in the text in verse 11 and verse 13, put on the full armor of God. Not most of it, all of it. Of course, it's obvious that if you're going into battle, you would want every advantage that you could have and we are to put on the full armor of God.

So he gives them six pieces of armor and you can see Paul, as it were, I mean, here's a man who is in prison and he has been in prison a number of times in his life. He's been chained to Roman soldiers. He knows to whom he writes are familiar with Roman soldiers because the entire Roman world is occupied by the Roman army and they see the armor and so he uses this metaphor as a way to say, "Listen, we're involved in a spiritual warfare and the armor that you see on a daily basis as you see a Roman soldier walk by, I want to show you how God intends you to arm yourselves so that you will be able to build His kingdom." We noted how Ephesians basically, the idea of Ephesians is you're building the spiritual temple, Ephesians 2:19-22, which is the church, and you're building that spiritual temple, the metaphor changes but the same concept, you're building the body of Christ in Ephesians 4:1-16. And then he talks about how you do that, pursuing personal holiness and pursuing corporate holiness in all of your relationships, husband/wife relationship, parent/child relationship, employer/employee relationship. And after saying all of that, how to build, he says now be ready to fight. Take up the full armor of God. Be strong in the Lord. If you build, you will have to fight and so, therefore, take up all of the armor. Not just one piece.

Last time we talked about the first piece of armor that Paul mentions is the belt of truth and we said that that was a mind, we said the idea of the belt of truth, truth, girding the loins of our mind as 1 Peter 1:13 talks about, girding the loins of our mind means to gather up in a disciplined mind, a mind that is disciplined to submit to the truth of God's word. A mind that is completely submitted to the word of God. I believe so that I may understand. We talked about that, Anselm's quote. And so we talked about that last time and today we come to the second piece of armor. Put on the breastplate of righteousness.

So we're looking this morning at the breastplate of righteousness. Paul invites them to consider this other essential piece of armor and it's interesting, the first three pieces of armor are all things you actually actively put on and fasten to your body. You fasten the belt of truth around your waist. You fasten the breastplate of righteousness to your chest. You fasten the shoes of preparedness to your feet. Then the others are things you take up. You take up the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, the helmet that can come on and off and you take those things up. So there's a little bit of a logical progression even in the way he describes it. You can see the Roman soldier getting dressed. He starts off with the armor, I mean with his armor, he starts off with the belt. Girds up his clothing so that he won't trip up as he goes into battle. And next he puts on the breastplate which fastens to the belt on the bottom of the breastplate.

Now let's think about as we did last time, start with the practical importance of this piece of Roman armor. You know, what's the practical importance of the breastplate? The breastplate, a strong, metal, protective covering that runs from the base of the neck to the top of the belt, obviously it protects the vital organs. It protects the heart. It protects the lungs. It also protects the liver, the kidneys, the stomach, and the bowels. The breastplate is of tremendous practical importance because the spear-thrust or the thrust of a sword that comes at you that penetrates into your chest cavity into some part of your abdomen can be immediately debilitating and fatal, and so we need in the same way a Roman soldier needed to protect his heart, his liver, his kidneys, we need to put on the breastplate

to protect us because the assaults of our enemy, the attacks, the spear-thrust of our enemy are aimed at our spiritual vital organs, as it were.

I think, in a sense, many commentators talk about this, that the rich language that the Bible uses for about these vital organs actually, we talk about the heart a lot. The heart's referred to a thousand times in the Scriptures. The other, though there are also these other things talked about, particularly the kidneys, the liver, the bowels, and you don't always see it because the text will sometimes translate it because it doesn't really, it doesn't say to us like, you know, my kidneys are aflame with your truth. If your kidneys are inflamed, you need to go and see a doctor about that. It sounds like you have a UTI or something, right? Anyway, so, but the idea though, the kidneys in the Scriptures there are a number of places where the kidneys are described. Proverbs 23:16, "My inmost being rejoices." Psalm 73:21 again the inner man is described there. And the idea of the kidneys in ancient thought was that there's a sense in which the inner, the feelings from within, the passions of the heart, the affections, the emotions that come out of you come from deep within.

You find the phrase bowels a number of times. If you read your King James Bible, you'll see that like in Philippians 1:8 or 2:1, Colossians 3:12. The bowels of compassion. Now we don't talk like that either but this is how they talked then and they understood that and there's a sense in which you think about it, when you really feel something deeply, you can feel it down into your gut, can't you? You can feel anxiety down into your gut. You can feel frustration. You can feel passion down deep inside coming out of you and this was what the ancients would describe how these feelings arise. And so in the sense in the breastplate is protecting the seat, all of these things here, the heart, the kidneys, the liver, the bowels, protecting the seat of desire, the seat of affection, the place where those desires arise from, those affections, the emotions.

So he's saying that as you move in to build, remember we're talking about the goal is we're going to build. We're not actually looking for a fight. When you go to talk to someone, you're certainly not looking for a fight and you realize what we just read in the text, our struggle is not against flesh and blood. The enemy is not the person who may even be acting like your enemy. The Christian knows, thinks soberly, that person who is even maybe yelling at me or insulting me or even maybe physically assaulting me is not my true enemy. The enemy is the spiritual forces of wickedness that are animating him and so that is the way we're to see this and we're to understand that knowing that our spiritual enemies are the real focus, when we move to talk to someone, we're talking to a brother or sister in Christ, we're talking to our spouse, we're realizing there's a need there and sometimes it's just asking a question, "Hey, you know, what's really, you seem to be really troubled today. Honey, what's going on?" You're actually if you're walking in the Spirit and your desire is to help them follow Jesus, you're building. You're taking up your trowel and you're moving toward them. Or you know there's a conflict and there's some conflict going on and you want to deal with it, or you know, you can sense there's a real issue here, you see sin in a person's life, someone's life that you're moving toward. You are building and if you are building, you must be prepared to fight. So you don't just take

up your trowel, you understand that even as I ask this question, there's a spiritual war going on and Satan does not want the kingdom to advance, the kingdom of God.

So in that we have to have our armor on. We have to have our breastplate on. This means that as we go, we can expect that we will experience thrusts aimed at our core, our trunk, where all of our vital organs are. Our feelings, our emotions, our affections, we can expect that there will be assaults on those realities in our lives. Now what's that look like? So you're trying to minister to a friend, a spouse, you're trying to build, you're trying to edify, you're looking for an opportunity to serve them, to address an area of concern, an area of perceived spiritual need, you begin to move toward them and a spiritual thrust aimed at your heart and your kidneys and your liver comes at you, what does that look like? It comes into attacking you for your motivation. It will look differently. Sometimes it'll be just like it attacks you in your conscience, in your sense of desire. Why do you even want to deal with this? It'll be like this, the only reason I want to talk to my spouse about her sin or she wants to talk to me about my sin is because I'm just really tired of it and I want, you just want things to work out for you. You see how that's a thrust at your motivation. Your motives are all wrong. It may come in the first person, my motives are all wrong. Who am I and this is another way, who am I to speak to this person about this problem? What business is it of mine? And looking at my, look at my record. Isn't it amazing how when you try to talk to someone about a really important conversation, isn't it amazing how you can recall so many recent failures and even past failures related in this relationship. They just come flooding in your mind. Sometimes it's like unstoppable. There's one. Look, look how you treated, you remember how you treated him the last time you talked to him. Well, I need to make that right or maybe I already made it right but there it is again anyway.

There is a spiritual war going on. Our flesh, the devil, they work against us. The world system, even the other person often will bring an accusation. They'll say, "Who are you to talk to me about this problem? You don't care about me. You just find my sin inconvenient, what you think is my sin, but you've got no business coming at me with that." They may say, "You don't understand my circumstance, therefore you have nothing to say to me." Now when that's happening, it's going to be hard to have a really productive conversation but you've got to understand spiritually to do what is best in that moment, to be able to speak anything that's going to be edifying, you have to wrestle yourself.

Now we've got to, I want to remind you that spiritual warfare, we've talked about this in previous messages, that the Bible is picturing spiritual warfare as happening primarily in the mind and in your mind and in the mind of the person you're talking to. It is in the realm of thinking and truth and lies. 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, another passage that shows how we're to see ourselves at war. Paul says the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but are mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds. We are taking, he basically says we are taking captive every thought to bring it to the obedience of Christ but he says, let me use his wording here in chapter 10, verse 4, "for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God,

and we are taking every thought captive." So spiritual warfare is, first of all, us taking our own thoughts captive and then helping others to bring their thoughts captive, and the goal is obedience to Jesus Christ. I want my thoughts to be obedient to Christ and I want to help this person that I care about have their thoughts obedient to Christ, and that's where the war rages, at the level of the thinking and the level of believing. So when you move to talk to someone, it's not surprising that thoughts are going to come and the question is are you going to bring your thoughts into obedience to Christ. Well, putting on the armor of God is about that. In fact, all of it is about that. The whole armor is about bringing your thoughts under control as you move toward someone to bless them.

So you're trying to help. You're trying to have a conversation that will be redemptive, will be encouraging, edifying. It may be a hard conversation, you're confronting what you really see, you were pretty confident is a significant sin issue but you're doing it in love and yet the question of your motivation. Who are you to do this? You don't really care about this person. And you know in your heart, "I am so selfish. Why has it taken me," it's like why has it taken you this long to come and talk to him about this? You've known about it for a long time. You really don't care about them. You see how those thoughts just flood and flood and they're very defeating. It's just like if you get a spear-thrust in a real battle into your chest, I'm telling you, you're not gonna fight very well after that. You're probably gonna be totally incapacitated, right? And so if you don't put on your spiritual armor, if I don't put on my spiritual armor, we will find that we will be incapacitated and rendered completely ineffective in the fight.

This onslaught of condemning thoughts can stop you dead in your tracks so that you drop the sword and the trowel and nothing productive happens. This is why we're to fasten on our breastplate and the idea is we should mentally develop the discipline of doing this as a part of our everyday life because we're always waking up in a war. And so one of the first things you do when you wake up, there are certain routines you go through physically, right? You know, we brush our teeth. We get dressed for the day. We shower. We shave. All these different things we have to do and so we do that as a part of getting ready for the day. Well, spiritually the same thing. We wake up. We spend time with the Lord. We get our thoughts right with him and we even think about as we go about the day, "Hey, I'm here to build. This is what I'm here for. This is my purpose, to build the kingdom of God, to build the body of Christ, to pursue holiness and to help everyone I come in contact with pursue holiness, to help every unbeliever I come in contact with to see the need to submit to Jesus Christ. And so that's why I'm here, and so now I have to put on my armor. I have to put on the belt of truth. I've got to be completely submitted to the word of God so that when I go into a conversation and they throw something at me, you know, what about this, what about that, I am completely submitted to the word of God. I'm confident in the word of God." And secondly, as they come at me or my thoughts come at me or they themselves say things like, "Who are you? You don't care about me. Your motives are all wrong." What do you do with that? What is the breastplate of righteousness?

One thing that's important, I want to show you this actually a couple of places. First of all, I want to show you in John 12, there's an interesting, something I just saw recently for

the first time, the verse I'm gonna show that hit me differently is chapter 14, verse 30, but there's this theme going on, one of the many themes in the Upper Room discourse of Jesus which takes place from John, the end of John 12 all the way through John 17 where Jesus is spending time with his apostles, his disciples on the night before he's crucified. He celebrates the first Lord's Supper with them, right? The Passover meal. And so in chapter 12, though, you have this theme that starts out and begins to be seen over and over again. Verse 31, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." The phrase "the ruler of this world," Jesus uses it three times in this one evening, three times in this one evening with the disciples. The ruler of this world. What he's basically saying is, "There is about to be a cataclysmic battle between Me and the ruler of this world." This cataclysmic battle is the cross. It is where Jesus is going to make a public spectacle of Satan and all of his minions. He's going to triumph over him in the cross so that the original first promise of the Gospel from Genesis 3:15 right after Adam and Eve sinned, when the Lord speaking to the serpent said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your seed and her seed, and you will bruise His heel and He will bruise your head." There's going to be enmity. There's going to be a fight, a continual fight between good and evil and the seed, when the seed comes, the seed of the woman that is Christ, you will bruise his heel in this great conflict, this cataclysmic spiritual battle, but he will bruise your head. He will crush you. He will be victorious.

Jesus is essentially saying this is the language he's using, the ruler of this world, Satan became the ruler of this world when Adam and Eve sinned, but the ruler of this world is going to be cast out. He says it also in chapter 16, verse 11, "and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged." But he says it also in chapter 14, verse 30, the middle of the three instances where Jesus talks about the ruler of this world. He says, "I will not speak much more with you," he's wrapping up this part of the time with them and they're about to go out and head toward the garden of Gethsemane and he's going to continue speaking to them as they walk. That's why he talks about the vines and the branches. It appears they're walking out, they see vine and branches and he uses that visual image to then talk about that in John 15. But before they go out he says in verse 30, "I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me; but so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here." What he's saying is, "Listen, it's gonna look like the ruler of this world is winning and has something in Me, but don't doubt Me. He has nothing in Me. I'm obeying the Father and I'm going to defeat him."

But what's interesting also is if the ruler of this world does have something in me, then there is not going to be a victory. That's how he defeats. Satan defeats by getting us to sin and convicting us of sin but he says Jesus is saying, "He has nothing in Me." Jesus lived a perfect life of righteousness and he's able to deal with all that Satan comes at him because Satan can find nothing in him and that's why he is the victor.

You might look at also sometime Isaiah 59:15-17 where it talks about Jesus, it's talking about the servant of the Lord who takes up the breastplate of righteousness and the helmet of salvation, and the picture is actually in Isaiah 59:15-17, the Lord is looking and

he sees there's nobody there to enter into the battle and so it says so the Lord himself took on himself the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, and he entered into the fray. It's talking about Christ. There was no man. It says there was no man who would stand up and fight so the man Christ Jesus comes and he comes and he wins the victory and Satan has nothing in him.

Now I say that to say this, when Satan accuses you and me, in a very real sense he does have something in us and in who we are. We're sinners. When he says to me, "You know, why are you only now doing this because you've known about this problem forever? Why haven't you helped him already?" That's a very good point. Why have I waited? You're only really wanting to help them because it'll help you if you help them deal with their sin and they won't be a problem to you anymore. You know how that in families, the way of the transgressor is hard. Sin brings misery and if you can help someone overcome sin, it tends to make everybody's life easier.

So that could be a selfish motivation, right? And when Satan says that or when that thought comes to mind, my flesh accuses me, yeah, there's some truth in that. There's some truth in that. How do you deal with that? Well, if you have the breastplate of righteousness on, you will be able to deal with that because what he's talking about, if Jesus, there was nothing, Satan has nothing in Jesus and you put, remember putting on the armor of light is putting on the Lord Jesus Christ? If you're putting on the armor of light, you're putting on the breastplate of righteousness, you are putting on the Lord Jesus Christ and in him, because of him Satan truly has nothing in you and you can acknowledge, yes, the weakness. You don't have to argue that. Yes. Somebody says to you directly, "You don't care about me as much as you should have." I'm not going to try to argue that point. "Yeah, I should care about you more than I have. But let's don't get distracted with that, though, that's not the issue. The issue is Jesus loves you and Jesus wants to help you and Jesus has sent me to help you." So it's really all about Jesus. "I want to be obedient to Christ and I know you want to," you're assuming that with a believer, right? "You want to."

This brings up one of the very, I think the idea of putting on the breastplate of righteousness, it's so important to understand how the Gospel is worked out in the Scriptures and there is a key word that is often, well, just not talked about enough at least it wasn't for me when I was growing up in the faith, and that is the word imputation. Imputation. It's a word that describes the way God's righteousness comes to you. So it describes the way God's righteousness is given to you. It's by imputation. That is, it's actually a word, it's an English word that describes some Hebrew words and some Greek words in the Old and New Testament. You find the first example of it in Genesis 15:6 when Abraham believed the Lord, God makes a promise, "Look at the stars, so shall your descendants be," and it says in chapter 15, verse 6, the first book of the Bible, "Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness." That's imputation, that God on the basis of his faith in the promise credited to him a right standing with God. It was imputed to him. It was, as Paul says in Romans 3, a righteousness outside of ourselves which is given to us. A righteousness from God, Romans 1:17 and Romans 3:20-25.

So this is the biblical Gospel that God has made a way to make you righteous in his sight and that is through imputation. He credits righteousness outside of you. Luther called it alien righteousness. It's not a righteousness that's in you, it doesn't inhere in you, it's completely alien to you. From the outside he credits a righteousness to you and that is the righteousness of Jesus Christ. To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to put on your understanding, your confident rest. If the first piece of armor, the belt of truth, was to actively submit to the truth of God's word, the breastplate of righteousness is to actively rest in the finished work of Christ. It's to actively rest and trust in the finished work of Christ.

This idea of imputation, he credits. It's a legal, I mean it's a financial image that he credits to your account his righteousness. It's like you are given a bank account of the righteousness of Christ. This is exactly what happened in the cross. He took your bank account and my bank account of sin and it was credited to him on the cross, and Jesus was treated as if he had lived our wicked and vile lives. Every evil thought, every evil deed credited to the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. God poured out his fierce wrath upon Jesus as he bears our sins. So there's this imputation, a double imputation: our wickedness imputed to Christ on the cross, his righteousness imputed to you through faith.

2 Corinthians 5:21 is a great verse that explains this. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He who knew no sin became sin for us. He became sin on the cross. Sin was credited to him. He was the sin-bearer. He was in the same way the Old Testament image of the day of atonement where the high priest would lay his hands on the scapegoat, lay his hands on the scapegoat, the high priest wearing a breastplate that had 12 stones on it, and each of the names of the 12 tribes of Israel inscribed on his breastplate, the high priest representing the people of God lays his hands on the scapegoat and confesses the sins of the people over the scapegoat, and then the scapegoat is driven outside the camp out into the place of utter desolation. That is, to be completely abandoned and made far from the presence of God, the camp, the center of the camp is where the presence of God is, the scapegoat bearing sins goes outside the camp. That's why Hebrews 13 says Jesus suffered outside the camp. They took him outside to the hill of Golgotha and crucified him there. He was abandoned. The sin-bearer taken out away from the presence of God. And you see it on the cross as the sky goes dark at 12 noon, for God is light and in him is no darkness at all. And Jesus cries out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me," quoting Psalm 22:1, illustrating and telling us this is what has happened, the sins of everyone who will ever believe, every single one of them has been credited to the account of Jesus and he is bearing in his own body our sins upon the cross, and he is experiencing the full weight and punishment of that, and that's why those wonderful words that he says right before he breathes his last, he says, "It is finished. Paid in full," is what those words meant in the Aramaic language Jesus spoke. They would be stamped on documents to say, "This debt is finished. It is finished." And so at that moment, he gives up his spirit to the Lord, "Into Your hands I commit My spirit." The veil in the temple is torn from top to bottom. The way of access to the throne of God is now made open to all those who no longer have any sin. There's nothing separating you from the presence of glory. You now

have free open access that was accomplished by imputation. God in his infinite wisdom, "How can I be just and the justifier of the ungodly?" That was a conundrum that for any of us would have been impossible but our God in the riches of his wisdom, the unsearchableness of his judgments, he perfectly handles this and deals with this and, indeed, he planned to do it before he even created to show the riches of his grace in lavishing upon people who really are wicked in themselves. You and I are wicked and vile sinners and yet God has made a way to take your sin out of the way, nailing it to the cross.

It is finished, and so that's why there is therefore now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus. There is no condemnation. There remains no guilt. No condemnation. Your sins past, present and future have been dealt with. They have been fully paid for. That's why Paul later in that same chapter, Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," in Romans 8:33 he says, "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? Who is going to bring a charge against God's people? God is the one who justifies." If God has justified you, what does it matter what someone else says about you? What does it matter what you think about you?

God has justified you and so resting in the righteousness of Christ is accepting this part of imputation, but it's even more wonderful than that. To really understand imputation, it's not just that your sin was imputed to Christ and he finished it, his righteousness has been imputed to you. That's what Paul's talking about in the breastplate of righteousness. His righteousness has been imputed to you. This is the wonder of the glorious exchange. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Think about Jesus. Think about how he loved God with all of his heart, with all of his soul, with all of his mind, with all of his strength every moment of every day. Think about the purity of his motivations. He did not please men. He lived to please the one who sent him. He said, "My meat and My drink is to do the will of Him who sent Me." More precious than his food was to please his Father. He lived the life that humanity was intended to live and he lived it to the ultimate, infinite level of perfection. More than 30 years, he obeyed God every time. Every command, positive command of God, do good, love your neighbor, he did it every single time. He didn't leave any good work undone. How often do we? I mean, our days are omitting constantly all of the good things we should be doing. Don't you feel like that? Even when you had a pretty good day, you can think back and think, "Why did I mess up in this conversation? I missed this opportunity. I didn't do this. I wasn't even thinking about that."

Jesus never had any failure like that, and not only that, he fulfilled every negative command but he never once did anything God says don't do. He never harbored ill-will, ungodly, prideful thoughts. None of that ever entered our Savior's life and so he, then, at the end of his life has been tempted as the author of Hebrews says in Hebrews 4:14, tempted in every way yet without sin. Tempted in every single way over and over and over again. Satan himself on the job. Tempted in every single way yet without sin, therefore he has the most beautiful and glorious record of righteousness.

The Father looks at him at the beginning of his ministry and the end of his ministry. There are three times that God speaks out of heaven during Jesus' earthly ministry. Two of them he says the same thing, at his baptism and at the transfiguration. At the baptism, Jesus being baptized and think about this, John knew, remember John had said when John the Baptist comes, he knows he's preparing the way for the Messiah to come. He hasn't seen the Messiah with his own eyes yet. He knows he's coming. He says, "One who's coming after me." "Hey," they say, "are you the Messiah?" They kept, you know, because John is the first prophet that's been there in 400 years and he's speaking with authority. They think maybe he's the Messiah. "Are you the Messiah?" "No, I'm not the Messiah. There's One greater than I who's coming. He was before me," though Jesus was born six months after John, "He was before me." John knows this is the eternal God becoming man. "And so there's One coming after me. He's greater than I. The thong of His sandals I'm not worthy to tie or untie. I'm not worthy to touch His feet, He's so much greater than I."

So that's what he said and then he's sitting there baptizing the people which is basically the Jews, the Jewish people are undergoing Gentile conversion rites. The people that were baptized before John's baptism were Gentiles, non-Jews, who according to not being involved in the covenant in any way were seen as those who were filthy and spiritually so far from God and to become a Jew, they would be circumcised but they would also be baptized, to be washed. John comes and he says, "Listen, all of you Jews, Pharisees, everybody, you all need to experience baptism." And they're like, "What are you talking about, we're Jews?" He says, "Listen, to experience God's salvation, you must understand that you are just as filthy as the Gentiles in God's sight."

Now so that's what he's doing. He's baptizing these guys because he knows they're filthy and he knows he is relatively speaking, and then Jesus comes down into the water. I mean, he's got a line. It must have been really a lot of work. I can't imagine doing all the baptisms he was doing. You know, it's not that hard of a thing but if you have a lot or larger people and then you're doing it, it can be tiresome. I've never had, I hope one day maybe we'll have a large baptism and I'll get tired, but anyway, John is doing it all day and Jesus, he's sitting there, next up, you know, okay, and he looks and he knows, "There's Jesus," and he says, I mean, he's thinking in his mind, "What are You doing here?" And he says, "I don't need, I can't baptize You, You need to baptize me." And Jesus says, "It is necessary to fulfill all righteousness." He doesn't say, "You're really wrong, John. No, I don't need to be baptized is right, but it's necessary to fulfill all righteousness." What's happening? At that moment Jesus is identifying himself with sinful humanity he came to save. He is formally embracing the mission of the cross. He is surrendering himself to the mission to say, "Though I'm not a sinner, though I'm spotless, I am the Lamb of God." John had just said that the day before, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." But he didn't understand the full implications of that, that's why he said, "What am I doing baptizing You?" Jesus is like, "John, if you were really thinking, you'd understand this. I have to bear their sins therefore I'm identifying with sinful humanity." And so he comes up out of the water. Jesus is baptized by John. He comes up out of the water and God out of heaven speaks audibly out of

heaven and he says, "This is My Son whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased." It's God like a father watching his son that's so overjoyed that, "That's my boy." It's that kind of thing to the nth degree. The Father delighting in his Son. "He's exactly what I want Him to be. He's exactly what I created man to be. I am so overjoyed in Him that I can't contain Myself, as it were, and I'm testifying to My great love for Him and my delight in Him."

The same thing happens at the transfiguration where Peter and James and John are up on the mountainside with Jesus. They fall asleep. They wake up and they see Jesus talking to Moses and Elijah and Jesus is transfigured before them. They see his glory, the Shekinah glory of God shining out from him. They see what John would later describe who's there. John, I think this is what he's talking about partly in John 1:14 when he says this, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us, pitched His tent among us." He's using language of the tent of meeting, the tabernacle before there was a temple. There was a portable tabernacle. He says, "The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us," and what does he say next? "And we beheld His glory." I mean, I think he's thinking about the whole thing of seeing his glory but I don't think he's not thinking about that moment he saw visibly the glory of Christ. We beheld his glory.

And so they behold his glory. There's Jesus, there's Moses, there's Elijah. Peter realizes they've experienced essentially a theophany. God has been manifest and he's terrified but he knows we need to die, we should die if we see God, but he says, "It is good for us to be here." In his terror, Peter rushes out and he's always the first one to talk and he says, "It's good for us to be here. Let us make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." And this is when God speaks. God is basically speaking to answer Peter. A voice out of heaven says, "This is My Son whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him." God is essentially saying, God the Father is saying, "Listen, Moses and Elijah, they are My prophets but comparatively forget them. It's not about them, it's about Him. This is My Son whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to Him. He is the fullness of My revelation. Attend to Him. Listen to Him. Worship Him. Honor Him."

The Father delights in him so now think about that's how the Father delights in the Son. That's how the Father loves his Son. That's how the Father sees the record of the Son. And now consider this: if you have repented and placed your faith in Jesus, the moment you believe God, the transaction happens for you that your sins are taken out of the way forever and his righteousness replaces that, and you are now seen by God as if you always had a perfect motive for every action. You are seen as if you always desired the good of every single person that you have contacted. Now it's not true of you, it's true of Jesus but that's applied to you. And putting on the breastplate of righteousness is basically that thought comes what's your motives are wrong, you're unworthy, who are you to talk to that person, essentially you could say, "You're right, right and right, but it doesn't matter who I am, it's who Jesus is. I don't have to worry about who I am, I'm not coming robed in my righteousness to try to help my brother or sister, I'm wearing the

righteousness of Jesus Christ. You have nothing on Him, Satan, and you have nothing on me therefore. I'm robed in the righteousness, the perfect righteousness of Christ."

This is what that song we sang I think last week, "Before the throne of God above, before the throne of God above, I have a strong and perfect plea. A great high priest whose name is love, who ever lives and pleads for me." It talks about "My name is written on His heart," and then he says, in the next verse, "When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within," that's what we're talking about right here. Satan tempts me to despair, tells me of the guilt within, it's a spear-thrust at your heart. Stop with your motivation. You're wrong. "When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see Him there, who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free. For God the just, God the just is satisfied, to look on Him and pardon me." If God the just is satisfied with that, you and I must be satisfied with that. Anything else is insanity and ridiculous pride. God is finished with your sin. He's given you his righteousness. If you are in Christ, there is no condemnation and you move toward someone in need, yes, you have impure motivations, even the best that you do in this life is tainted with sin, but that's irrelevant because Christ is my righteousness and therefore I will have this conversation, I will speak to this person, I will do my best, and my best at best is weak but I'm not coming in my own strength. I am being the first exhortation, I'm trying to be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might. It's not me versus anything. That's a losing proposition.

It's Christ who always accomplishes his purpose and therefore when we come with the righteousness of Christ, the breastplate covering our heart, covering our motivations, covering our imperfect desires, our imperfect affections, robed in his perfect desires, his perfect affections, we can move with confidence. It's the incredible paradox: we're weak, we're inadequate, yes, no argument, but Jesus is wonderful and Jesus is able, and Jesus in his infinite wisdom is sending me. God is sending me, he's sending you. He knows what he's doing and so we rest in that.

There's one other thing I want to say about putting on the breastplate that's also important. So it's so important to understand imputed righteousness. This is who I am in Christ and therefore all the accusations bounce off that breastplate. But there's something else that Jesus' righteousness is such a treasure and it's even so much more wonderful than we understand. So we're coming to talk to someone again. You're coming to talk to someone and you know your motivation's not what it should be, or maybe you're afraid. How often are we not afraid when we're gonna try to address something? We're anxious. We're fearful. We feel weak. We feel timid. And Satan comes and tells us, "Look at you, you're afraid. Look at you, you're trembling. Look at you, you're scared." Yes, that's right but I'm not coming in my righteousness, I'm coming in Jesus' righteousness. But there's also something even more wonderful than just that. That's the foundation but you add this to it. Jesus doesn't just save you from the penalty of sin, his righteousness is not just there to cover you from the penalty of sin, his righteousness is given to you to overcome the power of sin, that is experientially Jesus' righteousness is available to you and me as we move toward someone. His righteousness will be lived out in us. He will give us practically righteousness to move toward them.

Now your standing is completely in his finished work, what I'm talking about is this, a verse to look at would be Galatians 2:20. Paul says in Galatians 2:20, "For I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." What he's saying is there's a sense in which every day you live, you and I live, we're to do everything by faith in Christ. Colossians 2:6 says, "As you received the Lord Jesus, so also walk ye in Him." So you received him by faith, you received him by trusting in his work, and now continue trusting in his work. He's talking about this.

So you say the enemy comes or the flesh rises up in your heart and you say, "Look at my motivation, it is self, there's too much selfishness in me. That's right." And you start to feel that spear start to get behind your breastplate. "No, wait a minute. Who am I in Christ? It doesn't matter. Yeah, I am that but Jesus is perfect and therefore God has sent me into battle, sent me to build, sent me to fight for His kingdom and I'm trusting in His righteousness. But it's not just the standing that I have, I have sustaining power even now." What he's saying is as you trust in Jesus, you lay hold of his righteousness experientially, that is, he will give you his heart. "Yeah, my motives are impure and I stand in the perfect record of Him, but not only that, He wants to live His life through me in some sense. The Holy Spirit wants to recreate me into likeness of Jesus and He does that as I trust Him. And so, Lord, my motives," this is where it turns, "Lord, my motives are not pure but Yours are. Help me have Your motive or really seeking to bless this person. Help me be like You in seeking to serve this person that I'm talking to right now. Help me have the humility that You demonstrated when You got down and washed Your disciples' feet. Let me be like You. Let me have this mind in myself which was also in Christ Jesus who humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant. Lord, be that in me right now." And as you look to Jesus and you're looking to him and crying out to him, he will give you his righteousness so that you actually will move into that and your motivation will even be being purified as you go. So it's like you recognize, "Yeah, charge #1, correct. Charge #2 is correct. But I'm resting in Christ. Lord, help me with my motivation. Help me to deal with the fact that I haven't dealt with this for a long time. I probably should say something to them about that and apologize for that and acknowledge that but even now make my heart so that I really want to serve them."

And when you have all of that on, you are ready for battle. I mean, now we've got to put on the rest of the armor too because we're not gonna stop with just two pieces, but each piece is so important. You have to be submitted to the truth. You've got to gird your loins with truth. You've got to be absolutely submitted to the truth if you're really going to be effective for the Lord. And you have to rest in the finished work of Christ if you're going to really make a difference and be able to build and be able to serve and be able to fight against the attacks of the enemy, but it is all about Christ. And really every part of this is putting on the Lord Jesus. It's loving him. It's trusting in him. It's glorying in him. And it is sharing him. From first to last, he's the author and the finisher of our faith.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we thank You for the sufficiency of our glorious Savior. We thank You for the perfect wisdom that You have made known in Your word, how You, a holy God, so holy that You dwell in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes, we conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, our hearts in and of ourselves continually turning away, and that You made a way to make us righteous and then to give us a new heart and to do that in a way that was completely just, completely honoring Your holiness in every aspect, every sin fully punished, every wicked deed, every wicked thought fully dealt with, justice meted out, and Lord, the wonder of it that You could take our wicked record and deal with it fully and yet then by doing that in Your Son, now love us with an everlasting love and we go from being enemies to being children, coming into the family room of God. Well, Father we praise You for the glorious salvation that You've made known in Jesus Christ. Lord, we pray that You would help us rest, that we would have a confident rest in His righteousness; that we would learn to lean upon Him and every time the enemy, the accuser of the brethren comes, every time our sinful flesh rises up against us and accuses us, every time the world comes against us, Lord, let us stand and delight in Yahweh Tsidkenu. You prophesied in the Old Testament the Lord our righteousness. Lord Jesus, we thank You for all that You've done. Make us holy. Make us like You. Make us bold. Make us warriors. But may our strength be always in the Lord and in the strength of His might. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.