

“THE HELMET OF SALVATION”

Ephesians 6.17a

Dr. John S. Waldrup

In the Imperial Roman army, there was no portion of a soldier's armor quite so beautiful and majestic as his helmet. So, it is only fitting that the Apostle Paul referred to the helmet of salvation as the last piece of defensive armor the Christian warrior dons before taking up the offensive weaponry of the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And the order is fitting when you take notice. You can imagine a soldier sliding his shield onto his left forearm, then putting on his helmet with his right hand before taking up his sword to enter combat. So, the picture is complete to this point.

To refresh our memories of the passage before we deal specifically with the helmet of salvation, let's stand and read Ephesians 6.10-19:

- 10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.
- 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
- 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.
- 13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
- 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;
- 15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace;
- 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.
- 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:
- 18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;
- 19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

There are five passages in God's Word to read to understand some things about the helmet of salvation believers are commanded to receive, which ends up right back here in Ephesians 6.17.

Initially, we go to First Samuel 17.5:

“And *he had* an helmet of brass upon his head, and he *was* armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat *was* five thousand shekels of brass.”

This, of course, is the helmet worn by Goliath, the champion of the Philistines. Remember that Goliath had challenged the soldiers of King Saul's army to come and fight him one-on-one to decide the war between their two countries. But no Israelite soldier was willing to face Goliath in mortal combat until that shepherd boy named David came on the scene with food for his brothers.

Having seen God faithful to preserve him against a lion and against a bear, David did not doubt that God could enable him to prevail against Goliath. So, shunning King Saul's armor, which did not fit him, David

walked into the valley of the shadow of death that ran to the North and South between the two armies. Facing a wicked and implacable foe, David, armed with but a sling and five smooth stones, stood ready.

Approaching the giant, David let fly a stone and buried it in Goliath's forehead. Then he took the man's own sword and beheaded him. How did David win that battle? Hitting the mark with his sling was no remarkable feat. Hundreds of shepherd boys in Israel could have done the same thing. But the only shepherd boy there was David, who recognized that the battle was the LORD's. So, standing on the LORD's side when all others feared for their lives, David's faith in the LORD enabled him to defeat the giant, even though the ugly brute wore a helmet made of brass.

Psalm 140.1-7:

- 1 Deliver me, O LORD, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man;
- 2 Which imagine mischiefs in *their* heart; continually are they gathered together *for* war.
- 3 They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison *is* under their lips. Selah.
- 4 Keep me, O LORD, from the hands of the wicked; preserve me from the violent man; who have purposed to overthrow my goings.
- 5 The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah.
- 6 I said unto the LORD, Thou *art* my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD.
- 7 O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.

This is a Psalm of David. But to what does this Psalm refer? Who is the violent man he asked for protection against? It's probably not Goliath, since this Psalm was likely written after he ascended to the throne. But notice verse 7. In this verse, David recounts God's faithfulness to him in times past. To God he gives the glory for his victories in battle. And notice, he points out that "thou hast covered my head in the day of battle." What is it, precisely, that is used to cover a warrior's head on the day of battle? Those things are called helmets. In other words, God helmeted David, somehow, on the day of battle. History shows that the spiritual helmet David wore was far superior to the brass helmets his enemies wore.

Do any of you remember when Ken Connally, years ago, remarked that Moses burst out in song when God delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian slavery and destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea? Listen to the beginning of the passage that records the song of Moses, Exodus 15.1-3:

- 1 Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.
- 2 The LORD *is* my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he *is* my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.
- 3 The LORD *is* a man of war: the LORD *is* his name.

"The LORD is a man of war." Indeed, that is poetic language that conveys God as One Who is engaged in conflict against His enemies. And what happens when God is engaged in conflict against His enemies? He wins and they lose. Always. With this in mind, turn to Isaiah 59.16-17 and read along with me:

- 16 And he saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.
- 17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance *for* clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

This is the last chapter in Isaiah in which the children of Israel are rebuked for their unfaithfulness and idolatry, before the prophet declared their future glory in chapters 60-66. But notice that, again, the LORD pic-

tures Himself to His people as a warrior, as One Who engages in battle against His enemies on behalf of His people. In this passage, He described Himself as having on His head a helmet of salvation.

May I suggest to you that since God doesn't need to be saved, this helmet of salvation, this helmet of deliverance, can also be looked upon as a helmet of victory? I say this because, since God is omnipotent and mighty to save, as a man of war, He cannot be vanquished; He cannot be defeated. This is something to keep in mind when pondering the helmet of salvation.

Turn to First Thessalonians. A bit of explanation is in order before looking at the verse I have for you. First Thessalonians was written to new Christians who were undergoing persecution but were standing fast in the face of terrible opposition. To make sure they would stand in that evil day, Paul encouraged them by pointing them to the future return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the glorification of the saints, both those who would still be alive and those who had died by martyrdom or by natural causes.

The particular aspect of salvation Paul drew the Thessalonians' attention to in First Thessalonians, then, is the culmination of the believer's salvation, which is our resurrection and glorification. So, he was directing their attention, primarily, to the future. With that in mind, let's read First Thessalonians 5.8:

“But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.”

The Greek word for “helmet” is used only two times in the New Testament. This is the first. Notice that the helmet here isn't a helmet of salvation. It's a helmet of the *hope* of salvation. That is, the helmet is the confident expectation of future deliverance from this old, sinful world, all the way to heaven's glory. My, how a child of God can endure hardship when he knows that his next stop after the pain is glory land.

Now, we turn to Ephesians 6.17, and the situation we find ourselves in. We are not new believers who find ourselves in the midst of intense persecution. Most of us are believers who have been saved a while, who are not newborn babes in Christ, who are not suffering persecution for our stands for Christ, and who are increasingly aware that the conflicts of life we are engaged in are spiritual conflicts against an unseen and supernatural enemy.

To us the Apostle Paul writes, in Ephesians 6.17, “And take the helmet of salvation” Three words I want to focus your attention on and make application about:

First, the word “take.” Translating the Greek δέχομαι, which in this verse is in the aorist tense, middle voice, and imperative mode, the word “take” here does not mean to reach out and grab. Instead, it means to receive something that is offered. The aorist tense indicates that an action occurs at a point in time. You don't repeatedly do this. Middle voice means you take it to yourself or for yourself. Imperative mode means you are commanded to do it; it is not optional for each Christian.

Next, the word “helmet.” Here is the second time in the New Testament this word is used; the previous was in First Thessalonians 5.8. What is a helmet? The Greek is a compound word composed of the preposition, which means “around,” and the noun for “head.” So, a helmet is something that surrounds the head, presumably for protection. This head-surrounding protective device you are commanded to receive for your personal benefit. And receiving this helmet is not seen as a process but as a single event.

Third, salvation. With this word describing the kind of helmet we are commanded to receive, we know it's not a literal soldier's helmet we are to receive and put on, but something spiritual. But what is it?

Is Paul commanding his readers to be saved, to receive the salvation that is offered to them? Impossible. Those folks were already believers. You can't put on the breastplate of righteousness and be girt about with truth and have your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace and wear the shield of faith before you are converted. The helmet of salvation must mean something other than being saved.

Do you remember David's allusion in Psalm 140 to being helmeted by God? Do you remember Isaiah 59, where God describes Himself as a helmeted warrior? All that fits together. When Moses described God as a man of war, he recognized, by inspiration, that God fights for His people and wins the battles against our enemies for us.

What, then, is all this putting on the whole armor of God about? God wins the victory, but He wants us to be engaged in the conflict. Remember, David's great insight by faith was that the battle is the LORD's. With that in mind, let me suggest to you what I think the helmet of salvation is, without trying to be dogmatic.

When Paul commanded his readers to "take the helmet of salvation," he was not commanding them to be saved. Presuming you are saved, he commands you to take your salvation, like you would a helmet to protect your head—where you do all your thinking—and put it on, display it boldly, and wear it prominently. In other words, get in the fight, man. The victory's already been won. The foe has been defeated. Our place on the victor's stand has been assured. But for God's glory, and for your own personal spiritual gain, get in the fight!

Wear your salvation like a badge of honor, protect your own thoughts against defeatism and discouragement, and wage some personal war against the enemy. Quit this panty waist modern day Christianity that's afraid to get in a spiritual fight for fear of getting a bloody nose. Take the bloody nose and win the victory! How? Get involved in this Church!

I quite frequently begin by asking those seeking counsel with me after I have preached, "Why do you want to speak to me?" The answer, whether from a child or a teen or an adult, usually sounds something like this: "I want to be saved." My next question is oftentimes, "So, what do you think saved means?" Then the discussions go off in many different directions, depending on the answers I'm given.

Decades ago, we had an excellent preacher deliver a message about the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. In that service, we had more than 400 people in attendance, with 54 people coming forward at the end of the message in response to the invitation to be saved. I am not aware of a single one of those 54 people ever returning to our Church.

Never again will I, if I have control of the situation, ever deal with lost people without asking them why they want to talk to me, what they think salvation means, and things such as that. Would I have that preacher preach again? Yes. But never again will I allow well-intentioned Christians to deal with unsaved people that way, without providing for them the opportunity to learn how to deal with folks in an infinitely more effective way, the old-fashioned way, the way men of God used to deal with sinners ... by asking them probing questions.

I bring this message to you today because I get so many wrong answers to my initial questions. "Why have you come to speak to me?" "I need to be saved." "Okay, what do you think salvation is?" "Salvation is going to Heaven instead of going to Hell." Such an answer as that is based on the faulty belief that when a person comes to Jesus Christ by faith, he is saved from Hell. That's not precisely true. What is precisely true, according to the Bible, is that Jesus Christ saves people from their sins, not Hell. As a result of being saved from sins, the believer goes to Heaven instead of Hell.

I will ask and then answer four questions about salvation. These four questions will give you a good idea of what I do and how I talk to people. If you are here this morning and you are not saved, it will reveal to you what needs to happen in your life so you can be saved from your sins.

QUESTION #1. WHAT IS SALVATION?

Let me answer that question in three ways:

First, salvation defined. Salvation simply refers to deliverance. The word has the idea of rescue. In Greek, the word translated as "salvation" does not carry any particular spiritual or religious significance. It's a common

word, an ordinary word, a simple concept to understand: rescue, deliverance, salvage, recovery, reclaim, emancipate.

Second, salvation described. Imagine someone drowning in water. What does that person need more than anything in the world? Swimming lessons? No. Doctrinal truths? No. Should he be reminded of the physics of buoyancy and floating? No. He needs to be pulled from the water. He needs to be rescued. He needs to be saved. So it is in the spiritual realm. Sinners need to be hoisted from the ocean of sin they are drowning in and set upon dry spiritual ground.

Third, salvation detailed. Remember when God delivered the Israelites from Egypt? They had been slaves for centuries. They were unable to do anything about their condition except cry out for help. God provided them with a grand and glorious physical deliverance through signs, wonders, and miracles. There was the Passover and the blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintels. There was the death angel. There was the parting of the Red Sea. That was a demonstration of salvation. Another picture of salvation that is found in Paul's letter to the Romans is the idea of a sinner being a slave to sin. Salvation, then, is the means whereby the sinful slave to sin is purchased and then set free from sin so that he might serve another master; he is rescued from horrible bondage and is set at liberty; he is rescued; he is salvaged so that he might be free to do right.

QUESTION #2. WHY IS SALVATION NEEDED?

Salvation is needed, first, because of the nature of sin. You are a sinner. You inherited your nature of sin from Adam, Romans 5.12:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”

The nature of sin is such that, being as it is defiling and contaminating and repulsive to God, it is by its nature offensive to Him. Therefore, because of the very nature of sin, a sinful person, such as you are, cannot and will not enjoy God's heaven so long as the sin remains.

Salvation is needed, second, because of the behavior of sin. As if it wasn't bad enough that sin is repulsive to God, the sin of the soul and heart results in acts of rebellion against God. These are called sins, and they strike against God from a sinful nature that is contrary to God. Such sins as lying, cheating, stealing, drunkenness, fornication, pride, and gossip, to name a few, are all sins against God and accomplish nothing so much as to store up wrath for the day of judgment.

Which brings me to the consequences of sin. People usually say they want to be saved so they won't have to go to Hell. But this betrays their lack of concern about the cause of going to Hell, which is sin. Sin is the problem, sins are the symptoms, and Hell is the ultimate consequence. What kind of God does the sinner think God is? Will God allow willful rebellion for a lifetime, blasphemy against His holy name, disobedience to His commands, without consequence? No. Sinners need to be saved because their sin condemns them, they are condemned in their sin, and they can't do anything about their sin at all, like a drowning man needs to be pulled from the water by a lifeguard, so a sinner needs rescuing from his sin. But more. The sinner is spiritually dead and needs to be made alive when he is rescued.

QUESTION #3. BY WHOM IS SALVATION PROVIDED?

God, the Father, is not the Savior. The Holy Spirit is not the Savior. The Church is not the Savior. Baptism is not the Savior. Biblical truths are not the Savior. Jesus Christ is the Savior, the only Savior.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the Son of God. That is, He is the Second Person of the Triune Godhead. Interestingly, it has always been in the mind of God to send His Son to be the Savior of sinful men's souls. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ is spoken of as the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

To accomplish the saving of sinful men's souls, the Second Person of the Trinity was born of a virgin. This is called the incarnation and was the means whereby the Lord Jesus Christ obtained a human body.

It was in His humanity that the Savior could fulfill the divine plan to perform the necessary work required to rescue sinners from their sin. John the Baptist pointed out the Lord Jesus as "the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." How correct the Baptist was, for the Lord Jesus Christ, as the sinless sacrifice, went to Calvary's cross and took upon Himself my sins, and suffered the penalty for those sins, the Just for the unjust that He might bring us to God. Being just and righteous, God required that Someone suffer the due penalty for sins and offenses committed against Him. He could not forgive sins by pretending they were never committed. So, the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and bled and died as our substitutionary sacrifice on that cruel rugged cross. He became our Sin-Bearer. He took our sin outside the camp when He was buried after being taken down from the cross, dead.

After three days and three nights, the Savior rose from the dead. Why? Because as the Author of life it was not possible that death should hold Him. Because as our great High Priest, He needed to take His blood to heaven to cleanse our sins away. Because, as the fulfillment of all Biblical prophecy, His resurrection and ascension to the Father's right hand had been foretold.

This same Lord Jesus now sits at the Father's right hand, until His enemies should be made His footstool, and He returns to this world as the King Of Kings and Lord of Lords.¹ This is the lover of your soul Who is the Savior. Faith in anyone or anything other than Him for salvation is misplaced and damning to the soul.

Finally, HOW IS SALVATION OFFERED?

Because you are a sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, awaiting the ultimate consequence of sin, which is eternal torment, you need to be saved, rescued, and delivered. Salvation is a spiritual deliverance of your soul from sin, a rescue, a salvaging from bondage to sin. Such salvation can only be provided by the Lord Jesus Christ. But how is this salvation offered to you, a sinner? Allow me to summarize many Bible verses in just a few statements to show you how a sinner, condemned, is offered the salvation which the Lord Jesus, Who loved you enough to die on the cross for you, provides. Four ingredients:

First, there is the soul winner, the evangelist. This is the preacher who is referred to by Paul in Romans 10.14-15. No one is saved without a preacher. The preacher does not have to be a pastor but can be any Christian.

Second, the Scriptures have to be wielded by that soul winner. Romans 10.17 declares that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. But Romans 10.14 asks how anyone will hear without a preacher. So, the Scriptures have to be wielded by the preacher. The Gospel is typically delivered clearly and concisely by the soul winner.

But the soul winner must wield the Scriptures to sinners. No additional sinners are saved so long as the Gospel is preached to people who are already saved. Amen? It must be those who have not believed in the One Who they have not heard of who come to hear, by preaching, the good news that there is a Savior of sinners.

¹ Psalm 16.11; 110.1; Matthew 26.64; Mark 12.36; 14.62; 16.19; Luke 20.42; 22.69; John 3.13; 13.1; 14.2-4; Acts 1.9-11; 2.33, 34-35; 7.56; Romans 8.34; Ephesians 1.20; 6.9; Colossians 3.1; Second Thessalonians 1.7; Hebrews 1.3, 13; 8.1; 9.24; 10.12-13; 12.2; 1 Peter 3.22; Revelation 19.11

All of this done, still nothing happens unless the Spirit of God confirms, affirms, convicts, and draws the sinner to the Savior. No one is saved apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is really the Holy Spirit Who persuades the sinner of the truthfulness of the soul-winner's preaching. And it must be the Holy Spirit Who convinces the sinner that salvation in Jesus Christ is not to be put off, but is to be received when it is offered, is to be received now, just as the Scripture says.

When all of these factors come together, when the Spirit of God uses the soul winner to present the Scriptures to a sinner effectively, and when that sinner is convinced and convicted of his desperate need of Christ, that sinner will be miraculously transformed into a saint of God at the precise moment he places his faith in Jesus Christ.

Do you now understand salvation better? If so, I invite you to trust Christ as your Savior.