

As some of you may know, I'm originally from Chicago. And while I didn't live there very long, that's where my sports allegiances lie. And that means I'm a Chicago Blackhawks fan. That view is becoming less and less popular around these parts as the Dallas Stars have dramatically improved. If you follow professional hockey, you know that we've had Stanley Cup fever for the past several years. Sadly, our dreams were cut short this season. But during that time, my youngest son Joseph has developed an interest in the sport and asked Martha and I if he could play. But there's a special catch with hockey. You see, if you can walk or run, you can participate in almost any sport. But not so with hockey. You see, hockey is played on this real slick stuff called ice, and you've got to master that before you can even think about playing the game of hockey. Unfortunately for Joe, he doesn't come from what I would call a legacy of skilled ice skaters. In fact, Martha says my ice skating ability is in the style of a "flailing polar bear". But Joe is a real good athlete and I knew he was going to pick it up quickly.

So we signed up for a hockey camp and headed off to the rink one Saturday afternoon. We got there early to make sure we had time to put on all his gear. We fastened this belt from which hung pads to protect his legs. We slipped some pads over his head that covered his shoulders and extended down to cover his chest. We put ice skates on his feet and a helmet on to protect his head. And we finished by giving him a hockey stick so that he could take the attack to his opponent. He was equipped for success and looked awesome! And I'd like to show you a picture that represents how the majority of our day went. You see, what became abundantly clear is that, regardless of all the stuff he had on, all this protection he was wearing, Joe would never be an effective hockey player if he couldn't keep his footing.

This morning we continue in our series called *The Invisible War*; this spiritual battle between Satan and his demons and God, his angels, and his people. We've been considering the schemes Satan uses to attack and the defenses God gives us, known as the armor of God. Paul introduces it to us in this way:

**[Ephesians 6:13-15] 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. 14 Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.**

In that passage Paul tells us to withstand, stand, and stand again. Sounds like the battle involves a lot of standing. And if it does, it's probably important what we have on our feet. The third piece of armor is the shoes of the gospel of peace...

Paul uses the imagery of the shoes worn by a Roman soldier. These were called *caliga* and, as you can see in the picture, were a sandal that went to mid-shin area and on the

soles were what's called hobnails, similar to cleats on athletic shoes. These were heavy, sturdy shoes that dug into the ground, giving the Roman soldier a solid foundation to hold his ground and maintain his balance. And just as my son, though covered in sweet hockey gear, would be an ineffective hockey player if he could never get his footing and instead spent all his time sitting on the ice, a soldier, outfitted with the most advanced equipment of warfare, would be toast if he never had proper footing and wound up on the ground.

It's the same for us. While all the pieces of the armor are vital, **The Gospel of peace is the sure-footed foundation from which we fight the battle.** Through it we have balance and, as the passage says, a readiness or preparedness to engage the enemy. We can have all the other armor on, but if we are not settled in the peace that comes from the Gospel, we are vulnerable to an attack and can be taken out.

We need to understand what Scripture means by "peace" because it is far more than the absence of conflict. When we read the word "peace" in the Old Testament, it's actually the Hebrew word "shalom". It describes the ideal human relationship with God, one of wholeness, well-being, and completeness. It was often used to represent God's provision of the land for them. And it was used as a greeting between them. The New Testament use adds to it the idea that "peace" is a state of being. It's more than just a subjective feeling of peace. It's an objective recognition that God, through Christ, has set things right. And while sin shattered it, exposing the world to the control of the prince of the power of the air, the Gospel of peace tells us that Jesus came to restore what was lost and to bring peace to chaos. And so I want to talk through what the peace of the gospel brings into our lives, I want to consider how the devil schemes to steal our peace, and I want to close with how we put on the shoes of the Gospel of peace as a defense against those schemes.

So what peace does the Gospel provide? The first thing is peace with God. Do you know that when sin entered the world, man became an enemy of God? He wasn't just a little upset with us. He didn't just permissively say, "Hey guys, let's try not to do that again." Sin is so repulsive to him and so incompatible with his holiness that he cast Adam and Eve out of his presence and, through them, we all became enemies of God. But the God who says, "Love your enemies" showed us the way by loving his.

**[ROMANS 5:1] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

That word "justified" means a legal declaration of righteousness. This goes back into what we talked about last week. Jesus took on the guilt of our sin and made us right with the Lord. And if we are right with the Lord, we are no longer his enemies. And if we are not his enemies, we are at peace with God. We have to be solid on that truth because it impacts all the rest of what we're going to talk about this morning. We have peace with God.

The Gospel also creates peace with each other. I don't know about you, but I could stand to see more men and women living peacefully with each other these days. Earlier in Ephesians in chapter 2, Paul writes what Jesus has done to accomplish this.

[EPHESIANS 2:12-17]

**12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.**

In this passage, Paul reminds Gentiles what their reality was before Christ. They were far away from God. The Jews had the Law and related to God through the Law. The Gentiles did not. The covenants were made with the Jews, not the Gentiles. The hope of Messiah was promised to the Jews, not the Gentiles. The presence of God, for a time, was with the Jews but not with the Gentiles. And many of the laws the Jews followed told them they weren't allowed to associate with the Gentiles. The Law created both a spiritual and social barrier between the two groups, a barrier physically represented by a wall in the Temple that separated the Court of the Gentiles and the Court of the Jews. The boundary created hostility between the two peoples. But Jesus changed all that. Look at v14 again. **"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility."** Jesus is our peace. He's the reason we have peace with God. His work on the Cross achieved that. But it does something else. Jesus fulfilled and abolished the Law, the thing through which Jews related to God. It's gone. Now the way to relate to God is through Jesus, and it's the same whether you are a Jew or a Gentile. The Law, which created the wall of hostility, is broken down, and in Christ, there is now a unified body of believers called the Church.

You know, when I was a teenager, I remember seeing this incredible scene on television one day. It was a shot of the Berlin Wall. I'd seen pictures of the wall before. It was a symbol of Communist oppression, and most certainly a symbol of hostility. But on the night of November 9, 1989, it was different. Because on that night, what I saw was people sitting on top of the wall. They were hugging, they were laughing, they seem

overjoyed. You see, that was the night the East German government announced that the wall would be open and ultimately torn down. And on that night, after 28 years of separating two peoples, the wall was no more and the two peoples were united into one.

Jesus broke down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles, and he does the same thing for us. There are a number of ways that all of us are different, and that's a good thing. It would be boring if we were all the same. But Jesus has united in an identity more important than anything else. He's made us one in Him.

Finally, the Gospel produces peace within ourselves. Paul speaks of the Spirit's work in [EPHESIANS 3:14-19] **<sup>14</sup> For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, <sup>16</sup> that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup> may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup> and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**

If you've ever been on a merry-go-round you've likely noticed that there is a fairly large section in the center that's usually hidden behind some mirrors and lights. Behind that wall is the stabilizer, the anchor that everything is connected to, keeping everything together. Without it, as the carousel starts to spin, you'd have children on plastic horses flying all over the fair grounds.

Followers of Jesus have the Holy Spirit at our center, in our inner being, and he is the source of strength for us. Paul tells us we are rooted and grounded in the love of Christ. So as life starts to spin, because that's what life does, the love of Christ and his Spirit, who lives within me, roots and grounds me to allow me to stand firm and live in a state of peace.

So the Gospel gives us peace with God, with each other, and within ourselves. And you know that something that good is going to be opposed by the devil. Remember what his name means: adversary, accuser. He's our enemy, he's a thief, he's a liar, and his goal is to take us out. And to do that, he schemes to rob us of our peace. Let's consider how he does that.

The devil wants to rob us of our peace with God, and to accomplish this he uses shame. Now, we spent a lot of time on this last week but it's important that we see his impact on peace. Shame isn't just feeling bad about something we've done, it's feeling bad about who we are, that we are unworthy and unlovable. Remember we see that when Adam

and Eve sin and then hide from God. They put distance between themselves and God because they don't know their standing with him.

There's this fascinating and delightful dynamic that pops up every once in awhile in my marriage. From time to time I'll notice that Martha just isn't acting right. I'll ask "Honey, is everything ok?" and get a very quick "Yes!" "So nothing's wrong?" "No!" That's day one. Day two rolls around, she continues to act a little strangely, so I transition to "Martha, I can tell something's up. What is it?" That's when I get: "I'm mad at you. I just haven't figured out why yet." Sweet! So then I spend the next twenty-four hours tiptoeing around her, unsettled because I'm not sure how she's feeling about me, concerned that I might mess up and make it even worse, wondering during that whole time if she's still mad at me. I have no peace! Now, this happens only every once in a while in my marriage...because that's about how often I mess up...but that's how the devil operates. He accuses us, stirs us up, taps into our shame, and tries to get us to live our lives wondering and worrying about whether or not God is mad at us, robbing us of our peace. If I'm unsure if I'm at peace with God, that casts a shadow on my entire life and is very effective in taking me out of the battle. That's one scheme.

The devil also tries to rob us of our peace by dividing what God has put together. And what better way to defeat an army than to split it through hostility. The devil is the prince of the power of the air and so he permeates everything. Here's what I see more and more these days. The world is trying to put everyone into groups, into different classifications. There are no individuals anymore. We're grouped by our race, our sex, our political affiliation, our moral code, our economic standing, views on world issues. And the devil loves this because now he can pit one group against another. Democrats vs. Republicans. Rich vs. poor. Black vs. white. And this starts to make its way into the church where the devil wants us to forget that we are, first and foremost, one in Christ and instead to get us to start identifying ourselves in these other ways. And then we start looking suspiciously at someone in a different group and the hostility begins to build. Listen, we celebrate our diversity here. And we can have vastly different views and opinions on things. But here's where the devil wants to take it. The devil doesn't just want you to disagree with someone's position, he wants you to despise their person.

Guys, I'm telling you, this election is going to be a great challenge and test for the church. You've already seen what's going on. Accusations are flying. We have protests turning violent. I even read an article about a stranded motorist on the side of the road. Another car pulls over to help. The other driver gets out, starts to walk over to stranded vehicle, notices a bumper sticker supporting a certain presidential candidate, turns around, gets in their car, and drives away. I guess the bumper sticker really "Berned" that guy up. Are we going to let that kind of stuff seep into the church and divide? The enemy of our soul wants to take us out by making us enemies of each other.

The devil tries to rob us of our inner peace by taking the things of this life and twisting them to afflict us with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Moms, we honor you today. You think the devil may try to manipulate the love you have for your kids? Are you ever gripped with fear when they walk out the door? There's a sexual predator or drug dealer around every corner. They are going to die in a car accident. Growing up, Martha's mother was pretty sure there was ice on the road twelve months out of the year. You're terrified of the kids they may hang out with. You're so worried culture is going to push them to leave the faith that you're starting to think that even Veggie Tales is a little edgy. Listen, all of those are legitimate concerns, but they create opportunity for the devil to use them in such an oppressive way that we wind up insulating ourselves from the world to such an extent that we're taken out of the fight.

Some of you have just made a big decision. You even spent a lot of time pursuing the wisdom of the Lord in it. But now it seems all you do is ruminate on the consequences of it possibly being a bad one, that voice in your head saying, "Uh oh. This could go terribly wrong", tempting you to think that God is up there saying "Well, if you would have made this decision I would have been with you but, oh man, you really messed this one up by going the other way so you're on your own on this one."

Or maybe you just pay a little attention to the news. I'm so thankful the media reports extensively on all the good things happening in this world. A quick scan of the headlines tells me the San Andreas Fault is ready to blow. The economy is teetering, a record number of Americans are out of the workforce, and robots are coming to take the rest of the jobs. I'm constantly reminded about Islamic terrorism. A record number of Americans are renouncing their citizenship, taking themselves out of the fight.

The devil uses all those things to get that merry-go-round spinning and to get our eyes, mind, and heart off our anchor, to take our peace, knock us off balance, and take us out of the fight.

So, as Paul tells us, we have to put on the shoes of the Gospel of peace. And we do that in three ways. If the devil schemes to rob us of our peace with the Lord by shaming us and causing us to feel insecure in our relationship with him, we put on the shoes when we, and don't take this the wrong way, **rest in peace**. Recognize and believe that, if you have trusted in Jesus, you and God are good. I want you to consider the armor we've discussed so far. I believe Paul may have ordered them the way he did on purpose. When we put on the belt of truth, we acknowledge that God's Word is truth and that in it he tells us that he is holy, we are not, we can't do anything to fix that, but he can and does through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all we have to do is believe. By believing, we put on the breastplate of righteousness, where we are given the righteousness, or rightness, of Jesus, so that when God looks at us he sees Jesus' rightness and calls us worthy. And if we are right with God, we have peace with God. It never has to be a guessing game. God is not going to be good with you today but mad at you

tomorrow. The Gospel, the New Covenant, is a peace treaty with God, and it's been signed in the blood of Jesus Christ. See prayer partners.

If the devil schemes to rob us of our peace with each other by creating division and hostility, the second way to put on the shoes is to **live in peace**. There's something we all need to ask ourselves this morning: Where does some other aspect of who you are trump your identification in Christ? In other words, what's the most important thing about me? Is it Jesus? If it's not, you might be building a wall of hostility between you and your brother or sister in Christ. And if we are struggling with that, Paul tells us what our attitude and approach should be.

**[EPHESIANS 4:1-3] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

That which Jesus has broken down, let's not try to build back up again. Listen, you know how you live in humility and gentleness and patience as you bear with one another? You remind yourself daily that if a holy God considers Jesus' work on the Cross enough to make things right between him and us, it most certainly is enough to make things right between you and me. We may not be brothers and sisters by birth, but we are brothers and sisters by rebirth! And God is calling us to fight for unity and peace between ourselves so that we can fight the battle together and show the world the difference Jesus makes. We have our differences. We will have our disagreements. But more than that, we have our Savior, and through him we have peace with each other.

If the devil schemes to rob us of peace within ourselves by afflicting us with fear and anxiety about the aspects of our lives, the third way we put on the shoes is to **be at peace**. Do you know you, to a great extent, have control over whether or not you are at peace? We don't have control over the circumstances of what's happening around us, but we have control over how we respond. One of the best ways we can control our own peace is by controlling what we let in. I'm not encouraging you to be uninformed, but I am encouraging you to consider what voices you're allowing to have influence over your peace.

And so I offer you an alternative to the chaos-inducing chatter of the world. Paul continues in Ephesians 4 about how the work of ministry is to build up the body of Christ to spiritual maturity. And he gives us the purpose of that starting in v14.

**[Ephesians 4:14-15] 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the**

**truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.**

Our growth in Christ is the antidote to the poison of the schemes of the devil. Our peace is inextricably tied to our focus on Jesus. Think about Peter for a second. There's a scene in the Gospels where Jesus calls him onto the water. Now, can we all agree there's no worse footing than liquid? Yet Peter gets out of the boat, with his eyes, and his trust, focused on Jesus, and he has sure footing on the water. But then what happens? The waves and wind start kicking up around him, he takes his focus off Jesus starts paying attention to the chaos around him, and he starts to sink. It is the same challenge for us. These deceitful schemes are designed to toss us to and fro, get that merry-go-round spinning, and our eyes of Jesus. When your peace is invaded, turn off the noise and turn on Christ. He is our peace.

There's one more way we put on the shoes. And I want to close with this because, as soldiers in the battle, we all need to be reminded of this from time to time. Peace comes when we know the war is already won. It was won 2,000 years ago when the Prince of Peace hung on a Cross and declared victory by saying, "It is finished." And while the battle rages on, we know how it ends. And we have a part to play in it. **[Romans 16:20] The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.**