

Good morning Fellowship! It's good to be with y'all today, we are just in the second week of our series on the Armor of God. Kurt did a phenomenal job kicking us off last week. He talked about how we are in a spiritual battle against Satan and his forces. That spiritual warfare is real and we're in it, whether we know it or not. When we trust in Jesus, we are siding with God. We agree with what God says about Himself and what He says about us, and Satan desperately wants to turn us away from God. He is the father of lies and he will throw whatever he can at us to make us distrust God, to make us doubt who God is, and to make us less effective for His kingdom.

We all experience spiritual warfare, and one of the times I experience it the most is right before student ministry events. Seriously. Every time we have a lock-in I get excited I'm ready to go, and inevitably we play that first game and there's a conflict. A student gets hit in the face with a dodgeball, tensions are high and we've got to sort it out. Those nights are great, but by 4:30 am everyone is exhausted or there are kids still running around and you wish they were exhausted. At some point in the night everyone says, "God please let this be over soon." There are moments where relationships are built and there are opportunities for God to work, but so often I can miss them because I'm exhausted and far less attentive to those moments than I should be. It's a spiritual battleground, and at 4:30 am I'm rarely prepped to wage that war.

We need the armor of God in the spiritual battles of our lives. We need it to stand firm to withstand the schemes of the Devil, because he hits us when we least expect it.

We're going to be in Ephesians 6 today, and we're going to read the same section that Kurt did last Sunday to remind of us of why Paul starts talking about the armor of God. Starting at verse 10, he says, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 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..."

And that's where we're going to stop because today we're talking about the breastplate of righteousness. When it comes to ancient armor the breastplate was a crucial piece of the armor. It was usually made out of metal so that it couldn't be pierced easily. It covered both the front and the back, and it went from the neck all the way down to the thighs. The protection went all the way around. It protects the vital organs for us to live: our hearts, our lungs, the crucial bits and pieces. The core of a soldier would be totally shielded.

If a soldier went into battle without a breastplate, they wouldn't make it very far. They needed it to go against their enemy, and we need the breastplate of righteousness if we're going to stand against the Devil and his schemes.

Now in the Bible, righteousness has a couple of different definitions, and in order for us to know how to put on the breastplate of righteousness, we need to know what kind of righteousness it's talking about. Righteousness, in it of itself, means to conform to a standard of uprightness. (repeat the definition) For believers, God is that standard. To be righteous is more than just being morally good, it means to be holy as God is holy. God is perfectly righteous. He is our barometer for righteousness.

There are two kinds of righteousness for the Christian. The first type is justification righteousness. It's the righteousness that is given to us through Jesus. Before we trusted in Jesus, there was nothing righteous inside of us. We had no hope of attaining righteousness on our own. Paul tells us this in Romans 3:10 says, "For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰ as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God.'" But if we trust in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, God declares us righteous. This means that when God looks at us He sees us exactly as he sees Jesus: perfect, holy, blameless, and as a child. That's the good news of the Gospel. Because of Jesus there is no amount of sin can change our righteous standing before God. Jesus has taken care of us, and we can rest in the righteousness that he gives us. That's the first kind of righteousness, our imputed righteousness.

The other kind of righteousness that we have as Christians is the righteousness that comes from living the life that God calls us to live. After we trust in Jesus, our hearts are changed and we are enabled to honor God with our lives. We are no longer bound by sin and we are free to make decisions and live in a way that is righteous. We do this out of an obedience to God because of the love that He has shown us. We don't have to be obedient to earn God's love, but obedience to God is the fruit of salvation. We can call this sanctification righteousness. Kurt talked about this a few weeks ago. God has rescued us and He promises to sanctify us and make us look like Jesus. This isn't something that we have to conjure up, it's a work of the Spirit. He does it in us, and we live into it.

We've got these two kinds of righteousness in Scripture, justification righteousness and sanctification righteousness. What's amazing about each of them is that no matter which one you look at, our righteousness comes from God. Jesus' righteousness is imputed to us by God the Father, and then He grows us in righteousness through the Spirit. It's a complete work that each member of the Trinity plays a part in.

The reason that we need to define our terms here is because Paul has both of these pieces in view. The breastplate is the breastplate of justification and sanctification righteousness. It isn't one or the other, it's both.

This is a deep cut, but do y'all remember that commercial from like ten years ago where those two kids are arguing about taco shells? There's the kids and they're arguing back and forth, "Hard shell! Soft shell! Hard shell! Soft shell!" Then this little girl pops up and says, "Por que no los dos?" (Why don't we have both?) She figured it out! And then it cuts and there's a

big party and they've got the little girl on their shoulders, and the music is playing. Why don't we have both?

Some people try to separate our justification from our sanctification, but the reality is they aren't mutually exclusive. They exist at the same time, and one feeds into the other. Por que no los dos?

We need to remember that we have been declared righteous AND we are being made righteous. Because we are declared righteous, which means we are in right standing with God. And because of that standing, we are able to have a relationship with a holy God. Our sin separated us from God and the only way for us to have that relationship was if God stood in the gap for us. And it's through that relationship that the Spirit works in us to live a righteous life.

But we know it's not that simple, right? It's not that simple because we are in a spiritual battle against Satan and his forces. Kurt said it last week and I'm going to repeat it because it's worth repeating. "Satan is crafty, powerful, and organized." We are at war against an enemy who knows how to break us down. He knows that we still struggle with maintaining righteousness and he seeks to exploit our weaknesses. He prowls around like a lion looking for the areas where each of us can stumble, and then he attacks. Satan attacks our righteousness.

And when he attacks us, he doesn't play fair. Satan has an ally in the battle against our righteousness. An intimate ally who knows each of us all too well. An "inside man" who knows what tempts you, who knows what your triggers are, who knows how to deceive you and whisper to you until sinning is an easy decision. You know who that ally is? It's you. It's me. It's us.

We Christians are a people at war within ourselves. We are new creations in Christ and we have been brought from death to life, but the Bible warns us that our old self still lives in us. Our old self still craves the pleasures of sin. We can be so easily swayed and forget how important it is to be righteous, to live into the righteousness that Jesus gives us. Our old self whispers, "I know I shouldn't take another glance at that girl, but it's just one more look. What harm could it do." Or "It's just a little lie. It would cause a fight anyway, it's better if I don't tell him." Or "I know I shouldn't gossip about this person, but it's just such a big secret. I can't keep it to myself, I've got to tell someone." Our old self is still prone to let those sins slip, and it's in those moment where Satan can open the floodgates. Our old self is ignorant to the implications of what we are doing. We don't understand how little moments of choosing ourselves instead of God can lead to massive fallout. That is Satan's inside man, our old self, and Satan is more than happy to use him.

We need to understand that this is how Satan works. He leans on our flesh and chips away at our armor. And because each of us are different, he uses different tactics to cause us to sin. He'll use our personal weaknesses and bents towards certain sins to ensnare us. If your tendency is to struggle with lust, Satan is going to press on that. You've got a phone in your

pocket with no limits to the number of things you can see, and he'll remind you of that when you're at your weakest. When you fall to lust, you trade the joy of true abundant life with a cheap counterfeit that will only disappoint you and leave you empty. God has so much more for you than images on a screen or pointless casual flings. He wants to give you so much more, but Satan tempts.

If you struggle with depression, Satan will whisper that Jesus' righteousness covers a lot, but isn't enough for you. He'll flood you with doubts about your salvation and if you're really forgiven, and he'll sideline you from living in the freedom is actually yours. You'll become frozen in your fear and you won't make movement towards the Kingdom because you're terrified that it isn't for you. God has so much more for you, but Satan tempts.

If your weakness is pride, you may struggle to remember that you have weaknesses, and nothing is easier than attacking a base that isn't guarded. Satan will whisper that you're better than the other people you see, that you'd never sin the ways that they do. That you'd never make decisions like that. At that point, your heart can be so hardened toward others that you're not sharing the love of Jesus with anyone. You think you're honoring God, but really you're frozen from doing the main thing He's called you to do: share the Gospel. Satan has taken another soldier out of the fight. God has so much more for you, but Satan tempts. When we fall prey to these traps, Satan kneecaps our impact for the Kingdom. Our justification is still secure, and we are still saved, but the good life on Earth is taken from us.

The breastplate of righteous is a vital piece of armor because it protects the core of who we are. It covers our most vital organs as believers, the foundational beliefs of our faith. That God is good. That Jesus saves us fully. That God loves you and wants good things for you. We need the breastplate to cover our core because that's what Satan will go after.

Remember, Satan is crafty. He knows our weaknesses and he knows just what to say to make us question the core of what we believe about God. In the Garden, Satan didn't make up wild crazy lies about God. No, he twisted the truth just enough to deceive Adam and Eve. He does it to us too. Satan tells us that we aren't good enough for God to want to save us and that, if God has saved us, then we can't be good enough to make Him proud. He comes after our justification and our sanctification. He's not wrong here: we aren't good enough for God to save us, and we can't be good enough to make God proud.

Satan is telling the truth about us. He is, that's true. But he is lying about God. Our God is so good that He loved us when we were far from Him, and He IS proud of us in spite of how much we mess up. Jesus died for the weaknesses that Satan exploits. Jesus died for the moments where we fall to temptation. We can strive to be righteous, and Jesus died so that we could stumble towards righteousness like toddlers: tripping over ourselves and making a mess along the way. We won't do it perfectly, we'll struggle. But like a good Father, God sees the attempt and is just pleased that we're walking towards Him. Even when it doesn't look clean.

Even when it's awkward. He looks at us with nothing but love because of Jesus, and He is pleased with our attempts at righteousness.

In the battle against Satan, we are called to put on the breastplate of righteousness, but how do we put it on? Do we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and try harder? Do we wait until we don't want to sin anymore? No, the way that we put it on is to walk in the righteousness that God produces. Paul illuminates this for us in Galatians 5 when he speaks about the fruit of the Spirit. This is a passage many of us know well, but pay attention here to how he begins and ends this section. In verse 16 Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit."

Paul begins this section with, "walk by the Spirit" and ends it with "keep in step with the Spirit." The Holy Spirit has been given to us to produce the spiritual fruit of Christ in our lives. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are gifts of God that He grows within us. You and I have no ability to produce these things in ourselves; they are always the fruit of God's grace. But, we have been called to actively work *toward* what the Spirit is working *in* our hearts.

To "walk by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit" are calls to righteousness. They remind us that we ought to take God's sanctifying grace seriously. Paul essentially says, "The Holy Spirit is at work in your heart, so surrender your heart to the wonderful work that He is doing in you and for you." This is the work of God, and it's one of the greatest gifts to make His work our life's work. We get to work towards being the person that God calls us to be. That's amazing! Our God loves us so much that He changes us from the inside out, makes us righteous, and like a Father with His children, lets us grow and learn and change, all shepherded by His loving hand. We are not fully mature in Christ yet, and God frees us up to toddle towards Him. Catching us when we fall and reminding us that He's always holding onto us.

As God's children we strap on the breastplate of righteousness, and we make His work in us our life's work. There's a little bit of a good news, bad news situation there. The good news is that God works in every part of our lives to grow us and make us more like Jesus. In every part of our lives, He is present, that's the good news. The bad news is that that means EVERY part. The moment you're embarrassed of. The moments where you fly off the handle in anger. The moments where you make decisions that you don't want the people sitting left and right of you to know about. Paul Tripp says it this way, "God will use the unexpected, unplanned, difficult, and unwanted situations in our lives to expose our need for growth and to grow us in his grace."

This happened to me in a big way a few years ago. Jessie and I were dating, and we had begun to get more serious in our relationship. We started to talk about timelines and when we

might get engaged, and it was really exciting. I loved her a lot and couldn't have been more happy to be with her. Life was going really well. Then I became incredibly depressed. I had never struggled with depression before, but one morning I woke up and it was like there was a veil in front of me that tainted everything I saw and everything I felt. I was sad all the time, I didn't want to get out of bed, I had no hope for the future, I had no hope for Jessie and my future. It was awful. That lasted for about six months, and in that time I started to go to counseling. I began to put some pieces together. You see, the last time I was in a serious relationship it ended in a broken engagement. And when Jessie and I started to talk engagement, trauma hit me and my body shut it down. I couldn't hurt like that again, and no matter how much I loved Jessie and really wanted to be with her, my brain was telling me that I couldn't trust myself. All I heard from myself was, "Man you've been wrong before. Odds are you're wrong again." It was self-protecting, but I was believing a lie out of fear. And that wasn't the only lie I was believing. Because of what I had gone through, I didn't believe that I could trust God. I didn't believe that God wanted good things for me. I didn't believe that God was good. My experiences colored my view of God, whether I knew it or not. No wonder I didn't have any hope.

But I was so wrong. God is good. God does love me. I can trust God with my life. It took me going through the hardest six months of my life for me to see that. My depression was unplanned, unexpected, and definitely unwanted. It set Jessie and my timeline back quite a bit, but I believe God allowed me to go through that as a means of His grace to show me that I was wrong about Him. I'm a better husband, pastor, friend, and son of God for going through that season. I'm thankful that God was faithful to bring me through it, but also that He wasn't content to let me live my whole life believing lies about Him. As hard as that interruption was, I needed it. We all need it.

God shows us that in the big unwanted moments of life, but also in the little ones. When your kids are annoying you, God may be revealing to you that you value your own comfort over shepherding your children. When your spouse raises their voice and you breath in ready to go up another notch in volume, God is poking at your heart telling you to die to yourself because that's how Jesus loves us. When you're on your phone at night and you see a picture that tempts you to want to seek out more, God is exposing your need for affirmation and validation, and that only truly comes from Him. Everyone falls guys. Everyone sins, but the most important thing you can know about yourself is how you do it. Where are you prone to fall? Is it one of those examples, or is it something else? Ask God that question and pray that He would guard your heart and help you live into His righteousness. The good news is that God is at work in all of those moments. Satan is tempting you, but God is there too, and He's calling you to righteousness.

The way we put on the breastplate of righteousness is to see every moment as an opportunity for righteousness. God is at work in every moment of our lives, and every moment is a chance to strap on the breastplate of righteousness and glorify Him. It's not just in the massive life-changing moments that we choose God. It's in the mundane, it's in the unexpected

moments that pop up every day. Each moment of our lives is an opportunity where we get to choose to live into the righteousness that God produces in us.

Something I love about this analogy of the armor of God is that armor is something that is outside of us as humans. We have to take something outside of us and put it on to protect us. Our righteousness doesn't come ourselves. It isn't something we have to well up and make happen ourselves. We put on righteousness that comes from outside of us. Jesus purchased our righteousness with his blood, and this gift sits on the outside of us protecting us from the Devil and his schemes. But it also works to change us from the inside out as we live into the righteousness that God produces in us. God has us covered from all sides. He has taken care of every angle. We can trust that He is good and that we can follow Him.

One of the ways that we follow Jesus is by taking communion, and we're going to do that together this morning. As Noah plays, take a moment and thank God for purchasing righteousness on your behalf, and ask Him to reveal to you where you can step into that righteousness. I'll be back up in a little bit to lead us through the elements.

(Step down)

Our righteousness comes from outside of us to cover us and protect us, and it cleanses us from the inside out. The reason we have that righteousness is because the God-man Jesus Christ came to this earth to stand in our place. We can rest because he lived the life we couldn't, died the death we deserved, and rose from the dead promising to take us with him. We strive to be righteous because He was righteous for us, and we rest knowing that when we fail, he succeeded and it's ok.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Pray to close.