

This past Good Friday I was at my post in the Hub. Just as service was about to start a gentleman walked in, noticed my uniform of a light blue Easter t-shirt, and headed right for me. It was very clear from his movements that this guy was on a mission. He asked me “Are you a pastor?” I told him “yes” and he quickly said, “Well, I need to get saved again and I need to get baptized.”

Now, there aren’t many moments more fulfilling for a pastor than when someone expresses a desire to turn away from the life they have been living and turn towards God for salvation.

We began to talk about what brought him here, why he believed he needed to get saved again, what had been going on in his life. The constant refrain was that he wanted to get right with God. I was eager to get him upstairs to the service so he could hear the message of Christ on the Cross and what Jesus did for him to get him right with God. We agreed to talk again during the week about next steps and he headed up to the worship center.

I called him a few days later. He answered the phone and sounded less than enthused to hear from me. I reintroduced myself and told him I was following up on the conversation we had on Good Friday. To my great surprise, he told me that he was no longer interested in Christianity and was, instead, returning to his old religion, which he said was sorcery and witchcraft. I reminded him about his expressed interest in getting right with God but he politely apologized and said that he’d changed his mind. I told him that I would be praying for him, to which he objected, saying that he had a goddess already praying for him every night. I reiterated that I would be doing so also. He responded by yelling something, something unintelligible but I venture to say, probably not very nice. And then he hung up the phone.

As we continue in our series *The Invisible War*, I tell you that story for a couple reasons. First is to show you that the war is real and it's going on right here at Fellowship Dallas. We are not exempt. I also tell you that because, as this young man wavered between two belief systems that told him who he was and how he should live, he came here, to a Bible church. This morning we’re going to see that he came to the right place.

In Ephesians 6, Paul tells us that God has given us his armor as protection in this war, and today we are going to look at the breastplate of righteousness. Now righteousness is a loaded theological word. You don't normally have someone walk in the church and say, "I need to be declared righteousness before the Lord." But people do show up and say "I need to get right with the Lord." And when someone says that, whether they understand the full theological implications or not, they recognize something. They recognize that there is a breakdown in their relationship with God. It’s like when I meet with a married couple and they say, “Things just aren’t right between us.” They mean that there is an expectation or a requirement of their relationship that hasn’t been met. And it’s the same thing with God. Man isn’t right with God because we have not fulfilled the requirements of our relationship with him. But Jesus has done something about that, and we’re going

to discuss it this morning.

Now, it's no accident that Paul chose the breastplate to associate with righteousness. Romans soldiers wore breastplates to cover their vital organs while engaged in hand-to-hand combat. They were made from leather, metal, and chainmail. Without it, they were extremely vulnerable to their enemy's attacks. God provides a breastplate made of righteousness because it also protects a very vulnerable place from our enemy's attacks. In Jewish thought, our organs were looked at as the control center of our emotions. If you've ever had butterflies in your stomach or a gut instinct, you know what they mean. And most vital of all is the heart because it was considered the seat of government for an individual. The writer of Proverbs 4:23 says, **"Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life."** He means the heart affects everything we do, it determines what we think of ourselves, and determines how we live.

God gives us this breastplate because, if the devil can get to our heart, he can take us out of the fight. For us to fully appreciate this piece of armor, we need to understand the schemes of the devil against which the breastplate defends. So what attacks does this breastplate protect us from?

**Satan schemes to declare us unworthy.** There are so many names in the Bible which have meanings closely associated with mission, events, or character of the person who holds it. Abraham means "father of many". Moses means "deliverer". Jesus means "Yahweh saves". What about our enemy? Can we understand anything of his nature through the meaning of his name? Yes we can. When you study the meaning of "devil" and "Satan" you discover definitions like "adversary", "to throw or hurl", and "accuser". I think we can get a real good understanding of who he is, and what his tactics are, based on that. The weapon of our enemy is accusations.

Satan accuses in three ways:

The first way is that Satan accuses man to God. We get a glimpse of this from the prophet Zechariah (3:1). In this scene, Israel's High Priest Joshua is clothed with filthy garments that represent the sins of Israel, and he's there with two other characters.

**Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him.**

You might find this odd but God, in his sovereignty, allows the devil this kind of access. You also might find that concerning, given the extensive catalogue of things from which the devil could bring up for each of us. I don't know what he would say about you but I know what he would say about me. "God, look at Kurt. This sinner. He is so filthy. He's done this and this and this. He cannot stand before you and your holiness. He falls so far short of your glory. He has no right to anything but condemnation and death." And you know what? HE'D BE RIGHT!

If you have kids or been around them enough, you've likely seen this cosmic, spirit world drama played out in your physical world. It's called "tattling". You are God. One child is the accuser. And one child is the accused. And the whole intent is to get that kid in trouble with the boss. We've told our boys not to do that because of way it mirrors spiritual warfare. But they are crafty...like the devil, and now just exclaim "What are you doing?!?!?" loud enough for the neighbors to hear and clear enough to let everyone know that someone else is up to no good. Joking aside, though. The devil is a tattle-tale, but his scheme is not to get us spanked or grounded. It's to convince a holy God to look at us and say "unworthy" and stay separated from us forever.

The second way Satan accuses is God to man. Go back to last week when Gary was speaking of the devil tempting Eve in the Garden. Remember that he was suggesting that God's limitation on them was unloving. "Did God actually say you should not eat of any tree in the garden?" Implied there is an accusation of God's character, intended to create doubt. And here's where that takes us: If I doubt the character of God, I likely doubt the Word of God. And if I doubt the Word of God, I might start doubting that I'm not right with God. And if I start doubting that I'm not right with God, I'll start doubting that I need a Savior. And if I doubt all that, I'll doubt what he thinks of me and what he's done for me. And if I doubt that, God's truth becomes just another voice among many, trying to tell me what life is all about.

The third way Satan accuses is man to himself. By chance, are any of you struggling with a habitual sin? Something you've been dealing with for years? Pornography? Greed? Gossip? Resentment? Maybe a substance addiction? Or how about this: Have you committed a sin of significant magnitude, that even though the smallest of sins nailed Jesus to the cross, you've committed a big one? Any of you grow up being told you'd probably amount to nothing because you weren't much of anything? That's a playground for the devil. He's there to **remind** us that we're unworthy of God's love. He's there to **convince** us we are incapable of living for God. He's quick to **condemn** us because of that one sin we've been struggling with for years, telling us that we're pretty sorry because we can't knock it off or that God is unable or unwilling to help us stop. He's there to **disqualify** us by asking how God could use someone who's done something so wrong.

And when all those accusations start to hit home, we often respond in a couple different ways, both of which take us out of the fight.

The first is that we're going to try to make ourselves righteous. We see evidence of this back in the garden. Adam and Eve have sinned, they recognize they are naked and exposed, and they sew fig leaves together as a solution. We do the same thing. I used to be in a study group with a young man who had just graduated college. He was a pitcher while there and I remember the day he told us he was convinced that, if a guy got a weak hit off of him, it was because he wasn't living right that week. He had no problem if someone hit a 400 ft. homerun off of him. That was just a bad pitch. It was the weak groundball that just barely got through the infield, something all pitchers hate, that was God twisting the knife as punishment for veering off course. And so he would live rightly

with the expectation that he could go to God and expect, maybe even demand, favor. That's a silly story but it's probably not far off from the way a lot of us operate at times. Scripture repeats over and over that we can't make ourselves right with God. Isaiah calls our righteous works "filthy rags". Paul spends a considerable amount of time making sure we understand that one is not made right by following the Law. But so many of us spend our time striving to make ourselves right, all of which puffs us up with pride as we stand before God and tell him we are worthy because of what we have done.

There's another way we can respond to the accusations, though, and that is in shame. We see that played out in the garden when Adam and Eve hide from God. We do the same thing. I had a conversation with a young lady several years ago. She told me that she had had an abortion in college and that she was sure God could never forgive her. She's been far away from the Lord ever since.

I know this response myself. I'm not what one would call a patient man. There are several people who can attest to that, but likely none more so than my three sons. You see, on occasion, I really lose my patience, and I'm overly harsh with them. And in those moments, the accuser is there to suggest to me, or to confirm what I'm telling myself, that not only did I do a wrong thing, but that I am a wrong thing. In those moments, I feel unworthy to be the father of my children and I distance from them. I feel unworthy to be the husband of my wife and I distance from her. I feel unworthy of God's love and distance myself from him. And that's exactly what the devil wants me to do.

We have to recognize that both of these approaches have the same end. The first person says, "God, I have no need for your rightness because I can take care of it." The second says, "God, I have no need for your rightness because it is inadequate to take care of it." And if the devil, through his accusations, can get us to live in either of these approaches, he's essentially taken us out of the battle. He schemes to declare us worthless.

**Satan schemes to render us useless.**

Do you know that this invisible war has a saboteur? And that he sometimes cooperates with the devil to take us out? No, I'm not talking about your brother or your wayward friend. The saboteur actually lives in you and me. Paul refers to him as the "old self". Let's look at Ephesians 4 and see what Paul has to say about him:

**17 Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the**

**new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.**

All of us here who are followers of Christ are fighting this invisible war on two fronts. We fight externally against our enemy, but we also battle internally as well. Paul tells us that when we came to faith in Jesus, we were given a new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. That's our new identity. But there was something left over from how we once lived our lives. It's called the old self. We sometimes see this in other passages as the "flesh". This old self is a leftover residue from who we were before Christ. It is a package of sinful, deceitful desires that seeks to master us. And Satan seeks to tempt it because one of the most effective ways to take us out of the battle is to get us to live disobediently.

R.C. Sproul puts it this way:

**"The person who is involved in spiritual warfare, but is weighted down with his own sinfulness, is like someone trying to run through a battlefield with a robe around his ankles."**

The devil wants to enflame our flesh, seduce the old self, and induce us to live in way contrary to God's will. If he can get us to do that, it's tantamount to us taking off the armor of God. And when the armor is off, we are exposed and vulnerable. And when we are vulnerable, we're an easy target to be taken out.

So how do we do battle against these schemes? In defense against our adversary, God has given us the breastplate of righteousness. And our application is to do what Paul has told us to do. Two things happen when we put it on. The first is that we declare

**Christ's rightness makes us right.**

Let me tell you the story of Matt, who just got baptized. Matt is a science and math guy who has been diligently searching over the last few months. I had the privilege of talking through some of his questions with him. If you want to get your apologetics muscles a good workout, have a chat with him. I needed a nap after each of our conversations. But here's the beautiful thing. What ultimately led Matt to make a decision to follow Christ was that, in his study, he recognized that every religion required man to strive to get right with their god. But then he got to Christianity and heard about Jesus, our Savior, who condescended himself, came to earth, and did everything that was needed, fulfilling all the requirements of the relationship, to make us right with God. Matt recognized what Paul stated so beautifully in 2 Corinthians 5.

**2 Corinthians 5:21 says:**

**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

Jesus became the thing that ruined our relationship with God. And in what is called the Great Exchange, he took on our sinfulness for gave us his righteousness. Putting on the

breastplate of righteousness means seeing yourself as God sees you. When God looks at you, he's sees Christ's righteousness. Righteousness is not just something we have, it's what we are. And if we own that, if we go back to last week and put on the belt of truth about who we are in God's eyes, we can withstand the accusations of our enemy, knowing that we've been made worthy to be in the battle.

But there's a second part to breastplate. We will always preach that we are made right by God's grace, through faith in Jesus. There's nothing we can do to earn it, and there's nothing we can do to lose it. But something we'll never preach is that the way we live doesn't matter. Because when we put on the breastplate we are also declaring that:

**Christ's rightness compels us to live rightly.**

How seriously do you take a godly life? How seriously do you take sin? We cheapen grace when we choose to live contrary to God's will and, as we discussed earlier, we waken ourselves for the battle. Understand this: Before you were a follower of Christ, you sinned without even knowing it. You couldn't help but sin. You were 100% old self and you were going to live contrary to God. It's not like that anymore, though. God desires that we live rightly, and he's given us two things to help us do so: his power and his people.

When someone is baptized, we usually recite some version of Romans 6:4 which says, **"We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life."** We heard that hear this morning. But listen to what Paul says right after that:

**[ROMANS 6:5-7] 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For one who has died has been set free from sin.**

Do you hear that? The power of Christ, the rightness of Christ, has set us free from the power of sin, from the power of the old self, from the power of the tempter. Jesus has made it possible for us to live rightly. But it's a choice. We have to put on the breastplate of righteousness. And to help with that, he's given us each other.

Consider the chances a lone, isolated soldier would have against an entire opposing army? They wouldn't be very good. That's why the Invisible War is not to be fought alone. We are to confess our sins to each other, pray for each other, and encourage each other to love and good works. Do you have someone in your life you can tell, "I'm really struggling with this sin and I need your help"? Do you have someone who's praying for you and calling you to godly living? It's why we believe everyone should be in a Community Group because one of the great ministries we have to each other is to go to battle together, to fight this internal battle with the help of others so that we can stay and fight in the external battle. Do not do this alone.

And so I want to close with this and then we'll take communion. While God gives us armor for defense, for us to withstand the attacks of our accuser, we have an advocate, and interceder, a Savior who goes ahead of us to fight the war and rescue those in trouble. A couple of weeks ago the red light on my phone told me I had missed a voicemail. It was from the gentleman I originally met on Good Friday. In his message he apologized for what he said...which made me really want to know what he said...and he told me that he wanted to get right with God. We had a wonderful conversation a couple of Sundays ago where I had the joy of telling him he was made right with God when he professed faith in Jesus and that now we could begin to work on him living rightly. And I asked him if I could tell his story because it would be an encouragement to others and he said "Yes, please."

So our ushers can come forward because we are are going to celebrate together the work that Jesus did for that man and for us so that we can be right with God and live rightly for him. If you are a follower of Christ, I invite you to join us in this celebration. If you are not, maybe today is the day you tell God you can't get right with him on your own but that you believe that Jesus can. If you're not ready to make that decision, we ask that you let the elements pass as they go by.

On the night he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread, broke it and gave thanks, and said, "This is my body, broken for you. Things aren't right between you and God, you haven't fulfilled the requirements of the relationship, and there's a consequence for that, but I'm going to pay it for you." The body of Christ, broken for you. After supper was ended, he took the cup, gave thanks, and said, "This is the New Covenant in my blood. It's a new relationship between you and God, with new requirements, and I have fulfilled them all for you." The blood of Christ, shed for you.