

Manifesting the Manifold Wisdom of God
The Whole Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-24)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on May 29, 2016

Introduction

- ❖ **When the *Queen Mary* sailed her maiden voyage on May 27, 1936, she was the epitome of luxury and elegance.** The ocean liner featured a first-class dining room called the grand salon, which spanned three stories in height. She had an indoor swimming pool facility that spanned over two decks. She featured an outdoor tennis court, a salon, a library, a nursery for your children, even a kennel for your pets. She represented leisure and luxury at its best.

- ❖ But then war broke out. **Only four years after its maiden voyage, with the onset of WWII, the *Queen Mary* was converted into a troopship transporting soldiers into battle.** Her black and red exterior was painted navy grey. She was fitted with an external degaussing coil designed to protect her against German magnetic mines.
 - Her interior was stripped of all its furniture and decoration. King-sized mattresses and stately bed frames were replaced by triple-tiered wooden bunks. Six miles of carpet were stripped. 220 cases of china, crystal and silver were removed. Tapestries and paintings were taken down. The beautiful woodworking that decorated the interior of the ship was covered up with rough leather. And instead of catering to dignitaries and aristocrats in tuxedos and fur traveling for leisure, she housed soldiers in battle fatigues, armed with a rifle, and headed for war.

- ❖ **Needless to say, the *Queen Mary* was a different ship after war broke out. War changes things.** When you realize you're in a war, your **priorities** change. Things you once couldn't live without are not so important anymore.
 - When you realize you're in a war, your **attitude** changes. Your focus on self-preservation is transformed into a willingness for self-sacrifice.
 - When you realize you're in a war, your **ambitions** change. You begin to pursue a higher cause, a greater good than just your own. War changes things.

- ❖ This is the very point the Apostle Paul is driving home at the conclusion of his letter to the Ephesians. He dedicated the first half to expounding the gospel of God's grace in saving sinners in Christ, granting us new life, and calling us into a new humanity called the Church.
 - And then Paul spent the second half spelling out what it means to now live as a Christian, as someone radically changed by the gospel. **He's been describing what it looks like to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you've received** (4:1). And the walk he's picturing looks amazing. It's where you're walking in love and unity with the Church (4:3; 5:2). You're walking in purity in speech and conduct (5:3-14). You're walking in humility submitting to one another in love (5:21).

- ❖ But Paul doesn't want us to be naive. **If you're walking in Christ, you have to realize you're walking into a fight.** If you're a Christian, you're in a war. It's not a conventional war with conventional combatants. Paul says it clearly in v12 that "*we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.*" We're not fighting people.

- ❖ We're not at war with any group of religious believers. We're not fighting atheists or secularists. We're not battling those on the other side of a partisan divide. When we speak about Christians being engaged in an ongoing struggle, we're not talking about the culture wars fought against Hollywood or the mainstream media.
 - **No, Paul is talking about a spiritual war against spiritual enemies.** The greatest of them is known as the Deceiver, and one of his greatest deceptions is to trick us into thinking that our enemy is fellow man. When in reality, he's the one to contend with.

- ❖ Christian, when was the last time you considered this? When you took seriously that you're in a war with a spiritual enemy bent on your destruction? **Many of you don't feel like you're experiencing the kind of Christian life Paul has been describing.** You're confused as to why it's so hard to walk in the new self, why you're always dealing with the same temptations, why you're so often plagued with doubts.
 - **But could it be that you've yet to realize you're in a war?** Could it be that you're still living like a civilian in a time of peace, that you've yet to be transformed by the news of war? Maybe you're like the *Queen Mary* still dressed as a cruise liner, while sailing through enemy waters. You're wondering what are these mines and torpedoes doing here? **You're not dressed for battle. You're not ready to face the enemy.**

- ❖ That's a dangerous position to be in. So let's finish Ephesians by considering Paul's teaching on spiritual warfare. I've divided this message into three sections. 1) We'll receive our **admonition** from the Apostle. 2) We'll learn more about our **adversary**. And 3) We'll look at the **armor** that we're called to wear.

Receiving our Admonition

- ❖ Let's begin by receiving our admonition. Paul is strongly urging us to do something. First notice the reason why – why we should heed this admonition. He says it four times here. **Four times Paul says his admonition is given to help us stand against our enemy.**
 - Look at v11, "*that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.*" Look at v13, "*that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*" And v14, "*Stand therefore*".

- ❖ **So the good news is that – even though the enemy is committed to knocking us off our feet – it's possible to stand and to stand firm.** But how? Paul gives two answers that are really the same thing. First in v10 he says, "*Finally, be strong (dynamis) in the Lord and in the strength (kratos) of his might (ischus).*" And then in v11 he admonishes us to, "*Put on the whole armor of God*".

- ❖ Now let's first look at this admonition to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. **Paul understands that our weakness is our tendency to doubt our ability to resist the devil and his schemes.** The devil seem too crafty, too seductive, too tempting for us to resist. What can we do? We're just human.

- ❖ But that's the thing. **If you're a Christian, you're not just human.** Paul's whole point in chapter 4 is to argue that your old self (the old you) has been put off, and you've put on the new self, "*created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*". (4:24) **You're forgetting who you are in Christ, and what power is at your disposal.**
 - That's why Paul was praying for us in chapter 1:19 – for us to have the eyes of our hearts opened to know "*what is the immeasurable greatness of his power (dynamis) toward us who believe, according to the working of his great (kratos) might (ischus)*." Paul's talking about the power of God to raise Christ from the dead.
 - His word choices there, in the original, are identical to what we find in our passage, in v10. So when he tells us to be strong in the Lord, in the strength of his might, Paul has resurrection power in mind. **He's not just saying to toughen up. He's instructing Christians to appropriate the power of the Resurrection in our fight against the devil.**

- ❖ **We too easily buy the lie that we're just too weak to resist temptation.** But Paul will have none of that. He won't accept that excuse. If you're in Christ, you have the immeasurable greatness of his power working in you. Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.
 - Sometimes my daughter – who's only five but is a far more talented artist than I'll ever be – will be working on some art project and she'll make a mistake or get frustrated when something doesn't turn out the way she expected, and she'll try to give up. She'll say, "I can't do it. I'm so bad at this. I can't draw." And I have to tell her sternly, "No, that's not true. You're good at art. You have all of Mommy's talent in you. You can do it." If you know my wife, you know she's an amazing artist. **Well sometimes my kid just needs a reminder of whose daughter she is and to remember what's at her disposal.**

- ❖ In the same way, we often find ourselves frustrated and overwhelmed. We tell ourselves, "I'm too weak, too sinful, too immature to resist, to walk away, to do the right thing, etc." But here God is admonishing us through the Apostle Paul. He's essentially saying, "**No, that's not true. You *are* strong enough. You *can* resist the devil and his temptations.**"
 - Now it's different than in my daughter's case, because the strength we have is not innate in us. It's not something we draw out from within. **It's not a strength found deep within our souls that we have to tap into.**
 - No, the strength Paul has in mind is external to us. It's something we have to appropriate. **It's something we have to put on.**

- ❖ Paul describes it in v11 as armor. We're to put on the whole armor of God. We're to be strong *in the Lord*, in the strength of *his might*, because we're putting on *his* armor. **If we're in Christ and in his armor, we mustn't overlook what power is at our disposal.**
 - The Bible says greater is he in us than he who is in the world (1 Jn. 4:4). Scripture promises that a Christian won't face any temptation that's stronger than your ability to resist (1 Cor 10:13) **Do you realize you have the power of the resurrection in you because the Spirit of God resides in you?**

Knowing our Adversary

- ❖ Knowing the power at our disposal is crucial in this fight. So is knowing who we're fighting. This is our second point: Knowing our Adversary. He's identified as the devil in v11. **The Bible clearly affirms the existence of a personal devil.** He's known as Satan or Lucifer. He's a personal being, an evil being, powerfully evil being. And what's worse, he commands an army of evil spirits who are bent on your destruction. Look in v12, "*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.*"

- ❖ Now some people are going to think we're taking the Bible way too literally. This is the 21st-century after all. I was just talking to a college student this week who asked me, with genuine astonishment, if I actually believe the devil took the form of a serpent and tempted our first parents. He seriously couldn't believe I was serious.
 - **A lot of people find the idea of a personal devil hard to believe. It seems like a medieval concept.** It was understandable in a pre-scientific age, but it's about time we leave the devil in the Dark Ages and evil spirits to the stuff of horror movies.

- ❖ I've always appreciated what C.S. Lewis says in *The Screwtape Letters* about how man tends to fall into two equal and opposite errors when it comes to devils. One is to simply disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe too much, to have an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. The devil is pleased either way. Lewis says the devil "*hails a materialist or a magician with the same delight.*" **Whether you scoff at the idea of devils or see one in every dark corner, you're playing right into the enemy's hand.**
 - The book is about a senior devil (Uncle Screwtape) advising a junior devil on the art of temptation. At one point the junior devil asks if he should make his presence known to the human he's tormenting (i.e. Should I scare him?). Screwtape writes back and says no. The current policy in a modern and secularized age is to conceal their existence since it makes it easier to create materialists and skeptics out of us.
 - Screwtape goes on to say, "*If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that (it is an old textbook method of confusing them) he therefore cannot believe in you.*"

- ❖ **Lewis is essentially saying that modern man's skepticism of a demonic realm is actually the effect of demonic oppression.** We're too clever for our own good. We've rationalized away the devil and he couldn't be happier. The devil is a deceiver, and (according to *The Usual Suspects*) the greatest trick he ever pulled was to convince the world he doesn't exist.
 - Don't take him for granted. He's a dangerous foe. **The devil is a master manipulator.** He's had plenty of time to perfect his strategies. Just think about it. I'm pretty ignorant when it comes to cars. I know how to drive them, but I have no idea how they work. But if I dedicated a year to studying mechanics, I'm sure I'd be able to diagnose and fix most issues. Give me ten years and I'll be an expert.

- ❖ **Do you realize that the devil has had – not just one, not ten, not even hundreds – but thousands of years to study the human race?** He knows us inside out. He knows what makes us tick. He knows our weaknesses. He's had plenty of time to work out the kinks and perfect his strategy against us.
 - He's not out to kill us. He's not the grim reaper. No, the devil has a bigger aim. He knows everyone is going to eventually die with or without his help. **His goal, his end game, is for us to die in our sins.**

- ❖ Here's his strategy. **Before we sin, the devil approaches us as the Tempter** (cf. Mt. 4:3; 1 Thess. 3:5). He comes across as a helpful friend. He tells us that sin is the easy road to happiness and fulfillment. **In a sweet voice, he asks us questions that seem reasonable enough.** "Did God really say you can't do that? Is he really being fair? Is he really looking out for you and what's best for you?"
 - And suddenly you're not so sure anymore. You find yourself **doubting God's Word**. And if you continue to listen to the devil's comforting voice, you'll soon be **denying God's Word**. You'll find yourself questioning its authority, its reliability, its plain interpretation. And then in short order, he'll have you **defying God's Word**.

- ❖ **And once you've fallen, once you've sinned, the sweet Tempter takes off his mask and reveals the face of a terrifying Accuser** (cf. Zech. 3:1; Rev. 12:10). That's what the name Satan means, the Accuser. He's no longer speaking sweetly and gently. Now that you've sinned, he's lashing out at you. Calling you despicable and unworthy to go to God.
 - **He's like a skilled prosecuting attorney with the legal power to seek the death penalty.** And he'll always use it! He's an expert at God's law. Again he's had thousands of years to study it, so he knows it well and knows how to use it against you. He'll come at you hard. He'll throw the book at you.
 - But that Day has yet to come. Until then, his goal is to lull you into a state of complacency. **To distract you with enough toys and hobbies while the evidence of your sin piles up, and he builds an airtight case against you.**

- ❖ **One day every one of us will face death and, on the other side, judgment.** And if we have to stand before God on our own, we'll all be condemned. None of us will have an excuse, an explanation, or any justification. We'll all stand guilty before the Holy Judge and all be justly condemned to a second death. To an eternal punishment in a dreadful place called hell.
 - The devil probably snickers when he considers his diabolical plan. **He doesn't even have to lift a finger. We end up being our own worst enemies, bringing ourselves down with our own sin.** All he has to do is appeal to God's perfect justice. His job as a prosecutor, as the Accuser, is pretty easy.
 - And again until then he just has to keep us busy and too distracted to contemplate these things. That's not hard for most of us. And then what's left is to conceal himself by making the idea of his existence as superstitious or just plain silly. I'd say the schemes of our Adversary are pretty shrewd.

Wearing our Armor

- ❖ And that's why wearing our armor, the armor of God, is all the more necessary. On our own, we won't stand. We'll falter. We'll be crushed by the weight of our sin and guilt. So standing firm requires putting on the armor. This leads to our third point.
 - In vv13-20, Paul begins to describe the armor of God piece by piece. We know that Ephesians was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome. **Commentators think he likely dictated this letter as he was chained to a Roman soldier.** He would've had plenty of time to observe and make the connections.
 - Now the armor belongs to God but surprisingly fits us well. Unlike Saul's armor (which was ill-fit for David), this armor of God suits each of us perfectly. As if it were custom fit.

- ❖ **The first piece in v14 is the “belt (or girdle) of truth”.** We're supposed to fasten it on. Paul has in mind the leather belt connected to the soldier's underwear – not his armor. It was essential to keep his tunic together and to holster his sword. In the OT, you'll often come across this phrase, “girdle up your loins”. It's like the way we say, “strap on your belt”. In other word, ready yourself for action. Prepare yourself for battle.
 - Prepare yourself with truth. It's called the belt of *truth* – biblical truth, doctrinal truth – everything Paul's been expounding on about the gospel and our gospel identity. **He's saying to strap yourself with a sound and robust theology.**
 - “*Jesus loves me*” is a precious truth. It's one of the first things I taught my daughter as a toddler. But we don't send toddlers into battle. And yet some of us adults are going into spiritual battle strapped with just little more theology than that. **Theology is not a hobbyhorse for certain Christians.** No, a sound and robust understanding of God's truth – *theology* – is for every Christian who wants any hope of standing firm against the devil and his forces.

- ❖ If you're strapped with sound, biblical, doctrinal truth, then you'll understand how these next pieces of armor work. **The next is the “breastplate of righteousness”.** Think of a breastplate. It protects your vital organs. It covers your heart. Now this a breastplate of *righteousness*. This righteousness somehow protects you, it somehow covers your heart.
 - When Paul speaks of *righteousness* in his letters, you he's usually not referring to your own righteousness – your own moral behavior – but the righteousness of Christ that's credited to you by grace through faith.
 - **If you're a Christian, just picture Jesus's righteousness covering you like armor. It's the only thing strong enough to deflect the devil's slanderous accusations.** He's going to accuse your conscience, calling you nothing but a wretched, wicked sinner.

- ❖ And that would be true, if not for the righteousness of Christ covering you. **The Holy Judge doesn't see you in your wretchedness. He sees and accepts you in the armor of God, wearing the breastplate of righteousness.** This righteousness is what establishes and secures for us a right relationship with God. It's the strongest defense we have.

- ❖ Now the next piece of armor is what's often called **the shoes of readiness**. Look at v15, "*and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.*" This is a readiness to preach the gospel of peace – the peace we have with God. **To preach it to others for sure, but to be ready to preach it to ourselves every day.**
 - On those days when your shame runs deep, when your guilt feels like it might crush you, when the voices in your head are telling you how unworthy you are of God's love – you've got to preach the gospel of peace to yourself. **I love how Martyn Lloyd-Jones says our problem is we too often allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self.** In his book *Spiritual Depression*, he writes, "*Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?*"¹ Instead of preaching the gospel to yourself!

- ❖ I think that concept is very similar to Paul's idea of taking up **the shield of faith** in v16. He says in all circumstances take up the shield, "*with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one*". He's not referring to the small round shield we typically imagine. We're talking about a long, body-length shield designed to cover the whole person.
 - It's a shield of faith intended to protect us from the fire-tipped arrows shot by the evil one. I've sure you've felt their sting before. **These darts are all the various lies he volleys at us hoping that one will hit the mark and incite within us feelings of false guilt / false shame or selfish pride / selfish pity.** "I'm such a bad Christian. There's no way God can forgive me now. I deserve this little indulgence. No one appreciates me and how much I've sacrificed."

- ❖ If you find yourself entertaining these kinds of thoughts, quickly take up the shield of faith. And at the same time, **the helmet of salvation** (v17). By taking up the shield of faith and helmet of salvation, you're preaching to yourself of how Jesus saved you.
 - **He went to the cross bearing your sins on his back. He died in your place.** He experienced the second death for you. He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed (Isa. 53:5). Our sins are utterly forgiven.
 - And what does that leave the devil with? Nothing! **He has nothing left by which to accuse a Christian.** He's been stripped of his accusing power over us. He's been disarmed!

- ❖ **So why should we tremble at the devil and his empty accusations?** He's powerless over us. Listen to how Paul puts it in **Colossians 2:13-15**, "*God made us alive together with [Jesus], having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rules and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them in him (in Christ).*"

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures*, pp. 20-21.

- ❖ What an amazing passage! **It's because of passages like that, the devil is going to do whatever he can to snatch away the Word of God whenever he can.** In the parable of the sower, Jesus identified Satan as the bird who steals away the seed, God's Word (Mk. 4:15).
 - He's always trying to snatch away the Word, by distracting your mind or your heart when you're reading the Bible or listening to it preached. **The last thing the devil wants is for the Word of God to take root in your soul.**

- ❖ **The Word is what he fears the most.** He knows it can demolish all his strongholds, all his lies. It's like a mighty sword. Paul describes it that way, as **the sword of the Spirit.** The Word of God is to be wielded with skill and dexterity like a sword.
 - Just like how Jesus in the wilderness countered every attack, every lie and temptation the devil threw at him, by using the sword of the Spirit – we too have to train ourselves to wield the Bible, to thrust and parry with the same skill and accuracy. It's going to take practice. Years of practice by being in the Bible. **There's little hope of withstanding spiritual attacks if you don't know how to hold or swing the Word of God.**

- ❖ Now the final weapon we have at our disposal is prayer. Look at v18, "*praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.*" **Praying at all times in the Spirit** means praying in conformity to the purposes of the Spirit. To be praying for what he's praying for us with groans too deep for words (Rom. 8:26). That means we don't know the words he uses when he intercedes for us, but we can get the gist of it. He's praying for our faith.
 - **For us to have more faith in God's strength and less in our own.** I think this whole analogy of suiting up in armor can be misconstrued. We can walk away with the wrong impression thinking we're suppose to resist the devil by our efforts – efforts modified and supplemented by this new shiny armor – yet still *our* efforts in the end.

- ❖ But that contradicts the very point Paul is trying to make here. **His point is that we can stand firm in the face of spiritual temptation and oppression if we have the kind of faith that sees God's protection and provision in Christ to be as real and as strong as the armor Paul observed on the soldiers guarding him.**
 - In other words, do you believe that God and his gospel is the only armor needed, the only armor sufficient, to withstand the battle? We need to be praying for that kind of faith at all times in the Spirit.

- ❖ **Friends, the Christian life is not a summer stroll on the beach. It's more like a steady march through enemy territory.** If you fail to see this, if you show up in a swimsuit and sandals, you'll be continually frustrated as difficulties arise and temptations abound. And you'll be terribly confused when the flaming darts start raining down. You're in a war. **War changes things. So what needs to be changed in your life?**