

MESSAGE – Wearing the Armor

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Do you know why men wear ties? What's their significance? What's their purpose? I mean, are they for catching drips of mustard?

They don't keep you warm. They don't offer other forms of protection. In fact, they could be dangerous....

Evidently this element of men's fashion originated in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when Croatian mercenaries who were serving in France, wore knotted neckerchiefs which signaled to others their position and their alliances. King Louis XIV admired the neckwear and thus began a long history of men's neckwear being worn as a status or style statement. They have become synonymous with success and dignity. This kind of tradition heralds the statement: "The clothes make the man"

Nevertheless, the men's tie remains the least practical piece of clothing unlike the shirt, pants, coat, shoes and socks which all have not only a style statement, but a practical use.

In today's lesson we are given some vivid imagery that is meant to offer practical advice about what we are to put on as Christians who live in a world where while the victory is won, there are still the remnants of a battle being played out.

Ephesians 6:10-20

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. <sup>13</sup> Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. <sup>14</sup> Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, <sup>15</sup> and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of

salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. <sup>18</sup> And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people. <sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

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It is obvious that the author and the original readers knew what a Roman soldier looked like. They could recognize a Roman soldier by what they wear. What they wore had practical purposes. What they wore kept them ready to serve, to spring into action at a moment's notice. I imagine the author's imagination taking such an image and adapting it for the Christian.....who faces a battle as well. Not a battle like Roman soldiers do; not a battle of flesh and blood. But a spiritual battle; a good vs. evil battle if you will.

I can imagine the author looking at a roman soldier and piecing it all together....giving some sensible, practical advice for living as a Christian in the world.

Wear a belt. Let your belt be truth.

What the belt did: held the tunic in; won't catch on something. Won't flow, get caught in the armor, can't get grabbed by an enemy. This is what the belt does.

This is what truth does as well. Keeps us from getting snagged or caught by a multitude of distractions, falsehoods, etc.

For example: what if we put on the truth that the way of self-sacrifice and self-giving love is the way of Christ and the way of fullness of life with God. If we claim that truth and "put it on" everyday then we reign ourselves in, like a belt reins in a tunic, and we won't get distracted by selfishness, by a "me first" attitude, but will be ready to serve the needs of others. We don't get caught up in the power of greed, but will be ready to share our own resources. We won't be snagged by grudges and the nursing of past hurts, rather we will be ready to practice and proclaim forgiveness.

Wear a breastplate. Let that breastplate be right living

Obviously, the breastplate: offered protection for the major internal organs: heart, lungs, stomach....

There is protection for the Christian's heart as well: righteousness.

Those early Christians in the Roman empire were accused of many things. An old "story" called "Octavius" written in 197 ad by Marcus Felix describes a conversation between a Christian and a non-Christian Roman citizen that illuminates the accusations made about Christians....

Of cannibalism, excessive immorality, self-righteousness, atheism, foolishness, lack of patriotism to the Roman empires, and then blamed for the cause of the god's anger.... "If the Tiber overflows its walls, if the Nile does not rise to the fields, if the sky doesn't move or the earth does, if there is famine, if there is plague, the cry is at once, "The Christian to the lion!"

For the Christian in that day and age, there was no way to argue with those kinds of accusations. The only thing that could protect their heart, their spirit, was to keep on living right with God. That was their protection. They can say what they will say, but let my actions prove otherwise. Right living – no accusation can take that away. Right living - it protects the heart.

Wear shoes – but they have to be comfortable for you.

Obviously Roman soldiers wore a sandal type of shoe with a thick sole which prepared them to be ready for a long march at a moment's notice. They had to be comfortable to walk in.

Which brings to mind something I experienced a long time ago when I was in college. I had begun my journey in faith and one day sitting in the NIU quad, I watched a street preacher standing in the center preaching to the air. Nobody was really stopping. And I thought to myself, "I can't do that!". But through the years, I did learn how I was able to share the Gospel story. Street corner preaching wasn't for me, but relational evangelism was. Developing relationship; getting to know people; and in the relationship, being able to share. I don't have to wear someone else's shoes.

And that's an important lesson to learn. I learned it in a very practical way one time when my mother was visiting me in Virginia. we both had these little white sneakers we would go walking in. After she left and I went out walking, I realized that my feet hurt. It wasn't until a few days later that I realized that she had packed my shoes and left her own – I was wearing her shoes. They weren't like mine.

We can't wear someone else's shoes, but our own.....that is, we cannot wear someone else's way of sharing the Gospel...we have to be true to what is right for our own selves. Otherwise, we will not be ready to go the distance.

#### And then there's the shield

Roman soldiers carried a full-body length shield. It protected them from flaming arrows....a favorite weapon of enemies. Darts dipped in some sort of flammable and then sent flying.....well, a full-length shield can stop those darts and provide protection. These shields were made of wood and many times covered in leather.

The Christian's shield is faith. Simple faith. Faith that claims, "not death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That kind of faith quenches arrows that come at us like voices that say: you are a failure, you're not lovable, your life doesn't matter; voices that laugh at us.

Shields soaked in water quenched the flaming arrows even more. What if we soaked our shield of faith in the waters of our baptism every day....our baptism in which God has claimed us, washed us, and made us a place in an eternal kingdom?

#### And then there's the helmet

A roman soldier's helmet, while not only signifying which regiment or troop he belonged to, the most important thing it did was protect the head from a death blow.

For the Christian, salvation is our helmet. Salvation is the promise that there is no death blow that can end us. "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where oh death is your victory. Where o death is your sting? But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

#### Then we get to the only real offensive weapon: the sword

For a Roman soldier, their weapons included javelins and swords. What is mentioned here is a particular type of sword that is more like a knife. A machairan. Sharp on only one edge. it is a short, close-action sword.

It's interesting that the author doesn't write gladius which is what we think of usually when we think of sword. A long two-edged blade.

Instead, the writer looks at the roman soldier and names the machairan as symbolism for the Christian.

A couple things:

Our approach isn't about destroying someone else....

It's about getting close to someone and bringing the word of God to bear upon them.

and when the Word of God comes to bear upon someone, it's like a cut isn't it? It doesn't destroy us. But it does wound our pride and ego. It gets our attention.

Getting close to share the Gospel, not shouting out the gospel without a relationship

A last couple of points.

Put on the whole armor....

Not a part of it....it all works together.

Put on the armor

I have a colleague and friend who told me years ago that before she gets out of bed, she mentally and spiritually "puts on the armor". She names each component and claims it for her day. She puts it on her attitudes and in her mind. She puts it on her spirit.

She lays there in bed and counts off:

The belt of truth

The breastplate of righteousness

Comfortable shoes

Shield of faith

Helmet of salvation

Sword of the Word

And then she gets up....

And I have to say...that's much more practical and useful than any tie ever has the hopes to be.