

Sermon – 19/07/2009 am

The Armour of God – Helmet and Sword

Study Text: Ephesians 6:17

The ultimate in helmets and indeed full body armour must be our own Ned Kelly. His home-made suit of armour resisted the bullets fired at him. Soldiers wear helmets to protect their head. Some Roman soldiers wore simple leather helmets but most had elaborate metal helmets as part of their armour.

It is somewhat harder for arrows to pierce a man's head than his torso. The head is also a smaller target than the torso but the head becomes vulnerable in close combat. The head of course is a vital part of our body. It houses our brain and most of our sensory organs. We need our ears and eyes in particular if we are to stand against the enemy. In Old Testament times kings would often have their eyes put out as a sign of their defeat.

Helmet of Salvation

The helmet as a piece of spiritual armour represents salvation. But what does this mean? How does salvation protect us from Satan's attacks? The helmet of salvation was part of the dress of the divine warrior. His own arm brought salvation for him (Isaiah 59:16, 17). God the Lord worked salvation for his people. Our salvation is in Jesus Christ who died bearing our sin. He suffered the death that was our due, the penalty for sin. But death could not hold him. God raised him from the dead. Jesus won the victory at the cross, the victory in which we live.

The helmet that we take is the helmet of salvation given to us by Christ. It is not a helmet we have made or are making. It is to be received; it is to be taken up by faith. We stand in the name of the Lord. It is as if the words 'salvation is from the Lord' are boldly written across this helmet. We stand in the whole armour of God, including the helmet of salvation.

Paul refers to the helmet of salvation in another letter, telling the Thessalonians to put on *as a helmet the hope of salvation* (I Thessalonians 5:8). We understand Scripture and learn from it by comparing Scripture to Scripture. So here we have the element of hope included with salvation. Our salvation is a salvation of hope. We look back at the cross, to Jesus dying for our sin, but having died he rose again victorious over death. We are saved with the hope of the resurrection, bodily resurrection.

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most miserable (I Corinthians 15:19). The hope we have is not seen, for who hopes for what he can see (Romans 8:24). Our society is almost without hope. People see things, want them and get them. I listened to a woman saying how she had everything she wanted in life but still was not satisfied. She decided to go to church to find what was missing. When asked one day to give her testimony she realised she had nothing to say. Church was just something to fill a gap in her life. Wonderfully she later believed in Christ and he became her only hope in this life and for eternity. Only in Christ do we have hope that goes beyond this life and this world.

You do not believe that Jesus simply gives you a happier life in this world do you? Jesus himself said *I did not come to bring peace but a sword* (Matthew 10:34). He said that there will be wars and rumours of wars as the end approaches. If you do not have the wonderful hope of salvation unto eternal life and the hope of the resurrection you will not get far in the Christian life.

Satan wants to take away this element of hope that is in the gospel, and he has done so quite effectively. He has done so with the social gospel. This gospel is about peace and unity, about helping the poor, the oppressed and marginalised in the world. This is what many understand to be the message of the gospel.

Others listen to the prosperity gospel. This is a very different gospel but the focus is the same. The focus is simply upon self not others in this world. Both these gospels are preached in our society. Do not take hold of salvation that has no hope beyond this life.

Men and women of old lived with this glorious hope of salvation. Think of Abraham who was looking for a city built by God, a heavenly city. Think of Moses who gave up the pleasures and treasures of Egypt and looked for his reward in heaven. How many Christians today despise earthly rewards as they look to their heavenly reward? Do you? Satan has been quite successful in convincing even Christians that death is the end and that they will be annihilated rather than live forever.

Our salvation does bring peace and happiness in the present life. We have the peace of God despite the circumstances, be they poverty or prosperity. In Christ we are a new creation now. We live, or should live, a life that is different to those who do not believe in Jesus Christ. We do so because of the hope of salvation that we have. We live in the same world as everyone else but we are not of this world. We see beyond to the new heaven and new earth where Christ has gone to prepare a place for us. We must lay hold of this hope that is set before us, this hope that is an anchor to our soul (Hebrews 6:18, 19).

The New Testament Christians suffered greatly for the name of Christ. The book of Hebrews was written to Christians who were suffering and being tempted to turn back. They were ridiculed and persecuted, they had their possessions plundered and some were chained, just like the apostle Paul was as he wrote this letter.

But listen to what the Spirit of God says – *you know that you have better and enduring possessions for yourselves in heaven* (Hebrews 10:35). They were urged not to become discouraged and think of giving up the Christian life. To do so would be disastrous. To do so would be to give in to Satan, the enemy of our soul.

It is easy for us to grow weary. We are surrounded by sceptics and critics. ‘You don’t believe the Bible still do you? That book is so out of date. Scientists have shown it contains so many errors. When is this Jesus you speak about coming again?’ If you expect the world to get better think again. If you expect life to get easier for believers think again.

Do not grow weary in doing good for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart (Galatians 6:9). Be assured that *your labour in the Lord is not in vain* (I Corinthians 15:58). *God will not forget your work and labour of love* (Hebrews 6:10). We must stand in the strength of the Lord. We must stand with the hope of salvation as our helmet.

Sword of the Spirit

The final piece of armour is the sword. This last thing a soldier takes up as he goes out to battle is his sword. This is an offensive as well as defensive instrument. Sometimes offence is the best means of defence. As Christians we are called to go into all the world and preach the gospel. When we are active in ministry we will draw fire from Satan as it were, but we are more prepared to meet his attacks.

Are you teaching your children the word of God? Are you in ministry teaching the word of God? When we teach others we learn ourselves. When we are in ministry we learn the strength of the Lord.

When we share the gospel with our neighbours and friends we will be challenged as to how well we know the Bible. We learn by doing. We grow strong by exercising.

The sword is the word of God. It is a two edged sword. A friend of mine said this was the Old Testament and New Testament. *The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword* (Hebrews 4:12). It is the word breathed out or inspired by God. This word is our final authority, 'the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him'.

Martin Luther stood against the power of Rome and twelve centuries of church tradition by taking up the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. The Puritans did the same. Every article of faith, every practice in personal life and in the church was tested against the Scriptures. All preaching and teaching was from the word of God.

'Trouble in Amish paradise' was the title of a BBC documentary on TV a few weeks ago. Did you see it? Two young men were going through the same experience as Luther within this tight knit Christian community. Everyone went to church but they were not allowed to have English Bibles. They had Bibles in old German which few could now read. These two men committed the 'sin' of reading English Bibles and then of starting Bible studies. They were excommunicated by the elders of the church. Beware the wiles of the devil. The back door of many a church is left open to him.

In youth club we were watching a film about Christians in Rome in the time of Nero. In one scene two soldiers were fighting and one lost his sword. Without a sword he could not defend himself. Many Christians cannot defend themselves because they do not believe the Bible is the inspired and infallible word of God. They are fighting with a broken sword as it were.

Many do not know what is between the covers of this book. They also are helpless before the enemy of their souls. Knowing all about science, sport, politics, law or anything else in this world will not help you in standing against the devil. Your philosophy and clever arguments are no match for the wiles of the devil. This is spiritual warfare.

Why the sword of the Spirit? What has the HS got to do with the word of God? Everything! *Holy men of God spoke as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit* (II Peter 1:21). This is how we got the Bible. It is a living word because the Holy Spirit is active whenever it is read. The Holy Spirit takes that word and plants it in your heart. If you do not quench the Spirit you will grow in the knowledge and love of God just as surely as your body grows every day.

The Holy Spirit helps us in using the word of God. He helps us to learn it and to recall it when needed. In the next verse we are told to pray in the Spirit. When you are tempted by the devil answer him with Scripture. God promises to give you words to say, so take his words and defend yourself. This is what Jesus did when he was tempted by Satan. He resisted every temptation with Scripture.

Will you do any less than the Son of God? Do you stumble around looking for words to say when you are tempted? Do you do this because you are proud or because you do not know the Bible as you should? Is your sword blunt because you do not know the Bible? Some do not even know the Ten Commandments. Be assured the devil does.

As Jesus continued to quote Scripture to Satan, as he continued to hold up the sword of the Spirit, Satan left him. If you resist him in the same way he will flee from you also. Submit to God. Resist the devil by putting on the whole armour of God and he will flee from you (James 4:7). Is this your experience?

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