

*Where Are You Most Vulnerable?*

A news reporter was interviewing a man on his 100th birthday. "What are you most proud of?" he asked. "Well, " said the man, "I don't have an enemy in the world." "What a beautiful thought! How inspirational!" said the reporter. "Yep," added the old man, "outlived every last one of them."

The reality is there's an enemy we couldn't outlive, no matter how old we become.

Three weeks ago we started to look at a section of the Bible that talks about our enemy. He's called by a lot of names in the Bible. That old serpent, Satan, the accuser, the god of this world, the prince and power of the air, the evil one, and the Devil.

What we saw was that there's an age old spiritual battle that's been raging between heaven and the forces of darkness. We also saw that because Satan hates God and everything He stands for, Satan hates us because we're made in God's image.

Of all creation, only human beings are said to be created in the image of God.

That's why the Bible says if we're going to stand against this enemy we have to put on the whole armor of God.

Now, there's no doubt we are living in exciting days. The constant upheavals in the Middle East, the re-establishment of Israel 59 years ago, the Islamic hatred toward Israel, all point to the fact that we are living at the close of the last days.

The Eastern stage is being set for the rapture and then the return of Jesus Christ in power and glory to rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords over the nations of this earth.

We certainly don't want to set any dates for Jesus' return because no one knows the day nor the hour, but personally I believe that His coming will be soon. And if that is true, I would think we should be able to see some of the same conditions today as there were the first time Jesus came into the world.

As I read through the gospels one of the most striking things that I see surrounding Jesus' first coming was a flurry of satanic, demonic activity.

Jesus was constantly dealing with people who had been oppressed by, what the Bible calls, the forces of darkness.

As the second coming of Christ draws closer, I would expect to find this same major offensive being launched by the evil one.

Remember, as we saw in the past weeks, Satan isn't some cartoon character in a red suit with a pitchfork in his hand. The Bible says He's the great deceiver who comes as an angel of light.

His agenda is to bring disruption and confusion to Christians and non-Christians alike. And unfortunately he's doing a good job. He's skilled at what he does. He's had a long time to study human nature and he knows our weakest points.

And yet no matter how active and powerful Satan is, God has provided the resources for us to stand against him. We don't have to be victims of Satan's oppression.

The Bible says, *The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.* II Corinthians 10:4 NASV

It says, *But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* I Corinthians 15:57

*For we are more than conquerors through him that loved us so.* Romans 8:37

No believer in Christ has to fall to the attacks of the devil. In fact, all that God has provided for us has been provided so that we can stand instead of fall.

To enable us to stand, God has provided a complete set of armor. It's listed for us in Ephesians chapter 6.

### **Turn to Ephesians 6 pg 1041**

Two weeks ago we saw that the armor was paralleled by the battle array that Roman soldiers wore in the first century.

We're going to focus on the second half of verse 14 today so let's look at it together. **Read vs 14**

To not just be blown away with Satan deception, the first thing we put on is the belt of truth.

The Bible is called "truth." Jesus said "I am the truth." And so the belt of truth is the reality of

Jesus Christ, through a firm confidence in the Word of God. It's that experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ, not only knowing that He died for you and rose again, but knowing Him in an intimate and real way as you walk with Him through life.

That brings us to the second piece of armor which is also found in verse 14. This one is more an actual piece of armor than the belt was, this one is the breastplate.

The belt was essential and preparatory to the rest of the armor but the breastplate was probably the most crucial piece of armor that an ancient soldier wore.

The Greek word the New Testament uses is *thorax*, which is the basis for our English word "thorax."

The armies of poorer countries outfitted their soldiers in coats of heavy linen with bits of bone or metal fastened to it for protection. A more wealthy country would outfit their army with coats of interlocking pieces of metal. The standard weight was around 50 lbs. Goliath had a breastplate that weighed 148 lbs!

A standard breastplate had two parts - a back and front hooked together at the sides with leather straps. Some people have taught that breast plates only covered the front and therefore there was no armor protection from the back. They then go on to develop this idea that we must face our enemy and not run away and expose our unguarded back.

John Bunyan in his 1678 classic "Pilgrims Progress" had that idea - he wrote:

"When Christopher reached the Valley of humiliation he espied an old fiend coming over the field to meet him, whose name was Apollyon. (That's a name of Satan from Revelation 9:11) Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back or to stand his ground. But he considered again that he had no armor for his back, and therefore thought, that to turn the back on him might give the greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his darts."

Well, that's a good point of spiritual counsel. Don't turn your back on Satan and run. Stand your ground. But just like a soldier in battle had to be protected from someone shooting an arrow, or coming at him with a sword from behind, we have to have the full protection on too.

Satan would just as soon shoot you with his fiery darts, in the back as in the front. He's deceitful, he's tricky and if there is a vulnerable spot that is where he will attack first.

A Roman soldier's breastplate covered his back as well as his front. It was his major piece of armor.

A breastplate would cover the heart, the lungs, and all the various internal organs.

Now when a soldier was in battle he was careful to protect his arms and his legs, but the real point of vulnerability was his vital organs.

If a guy could stab you in the heart or in the stomach or in some internal organ you'd probably die. So that made the breastplate a crucial part of the armor.

### *I. God Has Provided Armor For Our Greatest Areas Of Vulnerability*

The Bible talks about thinking with the heart (meaning the real us) and feeling with the inward parts. We need to have a breastplate of protection from Satan.

If you think about it, Satan's attack on our lives comes in two main areas -in our emotions and in our will. Satan loves to cloud our mind with wrong thinking.

Some of his favorite philosophies are "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." "Jesus Christ isn't the only way to heaven." "Something may be true for you but not for me." "Morality is relative." "It can't be wrong if it feels so right." "God loves me so it doesn't matter how I live." "God couldn't love me because I've been too bad."

Recognize any of those? Ever fall into those yourself? Those are just some Satan's deceptive philosophies.

He wants to misuse our emotions by encouraging us to rely on the way we feel, rather than doing what God says we should do.

Proverbs says, *For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.* Jesus said, *For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.* The Bible lays a tremendous amount of stress on right thinking. It couples right action with right thinking.

If you deny there is a God, or if you don't understand the nature of God it's going to affect your view of right and wrong.

And so Satan wants to snatch away God's truth from our minds and fill them with lies, confusion, twisted morality, faulty theology, untruths, and half-truths. The more confused we become about God and the Bible the more apt we are to be tolerant of sin.

On the emotional side Satan appeals to the way we feel until we put feelings above truth.

You'd be amazed at how many people who call themselves Christians live on feelings. They go to church if they feel like it, they read the Bible if they feel like it, they pray if they feel like it. They live a moral lifestyle, if they feel like it.

Listen, if Satan has his way you'll never feel like doing what you should do.

A clouded brain and a distorted reliance on misleading emotions will bring us down every time.

These are points of greatest vulnerability. This is where his fiery darts will hit first of all. This is where we need a breastplate to protect us.

But now what kind of breastplate are we going to put on? What's going to guard our vital areas? God calls this "the breastplate of righteousness." Literally a breastplate which is righteousness.

What that breastplate was to a soldier, righteousness is to a Christian.

*I. God Has Provided Armor For Our Greatest Areas Of Vulnerability*

*II. God Has Demonstrated His Commitment To Righteousness*

Now I think the real underlying explanation of what the breastplate is, is found not in the new but in the Old Testament. It's there that we find, God wearing this armor.

The phrase "the breastplate of righteousness" is a quotation from the Prophet Isaiah, and I'd like you to see it from **Isaiah chapter 59**. Turn there with me this morning. **Pg 657**

Isaiah 59 is one of the great Messianic passages of the Old Testament. This pictures the coming of the Messiah to Israel and to Zion.

If you looked at the 1st 8 verses of Isaiah 59 you would see the indictment that Isaiah makes against Israel.

The chapter begins - **verse 1 & 2**

And if you continue down to verse 8 you would see the list of Israel's sins that brought this separation between them and God. When you move in verse 9 to verse 15 you find Isaiah standing as representative for Israel confessing their sin. Now verse 15 to the end, you come to the second coming of Christ. This is after the rapture, after the tribulation period when Jesus physically returns to establish His kingdom.

Verse 15 tells us of certain conditions that will exist when he returns - **Read 15**

Then He prepares himself to come back and to enter into combat **Read 16 - 17**

Verse 18 is the battle - **Read 18**

When you come to verse 19 you have the victory. **Read 19 - 20**

In preparation for His second coming to bring judgment upon His enemies and the enemies of Israel Jesus Christ puts on the breastplate of righteousness.

To put on the breastplate of righteousness means that everything he does is in line with His righteous character. His conduct is in harmony with His nature.

When He comes He'll deal with His enemies righteously. No one will ever be able to accuse Jesus Christ of acting unjustly. He'll cast Satan into the bottomless pit, he'll destroy the armies of the anti-Christ but all will be done in perfect harmony with His character, as a holy, just, and righteous God. God's actions are always righteous.

Bringing this over Ephesians 6 we're told that we're to clothe ourselves in the armor of God. We are to put on that same breastplate of righteousness.

So what is righteousness, and how do we put it on? The word actually means "rightness," in the sense of being innocent, just, or not guilty.

There's 2 types of righteousness spoken of in the Bible. One is God's righteousness and the other is human righteousness. The question is could we possibly stand in human righteousness and resist the devil. Can our own good works and morality enable us to stand against the wiles of the devil?

I honestly believe that more Christians fall because they try to stand in their own human righteousness than for almost any other reason. What is human righteousness?

It has its source in our humanity. In Philippians 3:4 Paul describes himself before he was saved as having "confidence in the flesh."

The basis of human righteousness is good works. Titus 3:5 tells us that God never accepts us because of works of righteousness which we have done. The product of human righteousness is human good.

In Romans Paul who was a Jewish believer in Jesus says, *Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not*

*according to knowledge.*

*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God. Romans 10:1-3*

When it comes to forgiveness and salvation, God never accepts human good works.

Isaiah explained that all of our righteousness is as filthy rags in God's estimation. The New Testament says, *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior. Titus 3:5-6*

Human righteousness is totally inadequate for salvation because human righteousness falls far short of God's perfect standard. Satan's lie is that we can get to heaven by our own good works.

His lie is manifested in thousands of different nuances by the religions of the world, but ultimately they all say the same thing. That human beings can do something to make themselves acceptable to God.

God's truth runs just the opposite of Satan's lie. God's truth is found in Roman's chapter 4 and verse 5: *But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.*

We're saved by faith because it's by faith we believe that Jesus Christ died to pray for our sins and offer us forgiveness. Human goodness has nothing to offer when it comes to salvation.

But then there's even more that human righteousness can't do.

It's tough for people to grasp onto the truth that salvation from the penalty of sin is the work of God and Him alone. Salvation is of the Lord, from beginning to end and our righteousness doesn't enter into it all.

But as much as that's a hurdle for people to get over, it seems even more difficult for believers in Jesus Christ to realize that the life which God calls them to live is not of themselves. We don't have it in us.

Because of this lack of understanding, many believers strive for high ideals of morality, instead of yielding themselves to the power of God which will enable them to live out the even higher divine standards under grace.

When we see that God's standards of life for us are really on a divine plane; when we see that

God doesn't want us to be good people He calls us to be godly people. Then it becomes evident that something more than what's in us is needed.

*I. God Has Provided Armor For Our Greatest Areas Of Vulnerability*

*II. God Has Demonstrated His Commitment To Righteousness*

*III. God Wants Everything To Be Done In Dependence On Him So That He Gets All The Worship And Glory*

*For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36*

*Isaiah 42:8 I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another.*

We're not God and He's not about to give His glory to us. This isn't about what we can do, it's about what He is doing.

That's why the life of a Christian is to be one of complete dependence upon God. It's all about Him. We think it's all about us but it isn't. That's a Satanic deception.

In the Bible there's a constant emphasis upon the truth that it's God who works.

*Philippians 2:13 For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

*Hebrew 13:20 Now may the God of peace...make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*I Corinthians 3:7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase.*

Not only that but to show that it's all about God and not about us, special emphasis is placed upon our weakness.

*2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. NIV*

*2 Corinthians 3:5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.*

Now listen, whenever there is failure in our life as Christians, whenever we fall to temptation, whenever we yield to the power of sin - it is because of our focus on self, instead of God.

We're to take on the armor of God. The breastplate of righteousness. If we stand before Satan in our own human righteousness, in our very best, in our own strength it's going to be like wearing a plastic Ronald McDonald bib. We're not going to stand against Satan for a minute. His fiery darts are going to blast right on through. His attacks are going to bring us down.

Here's the biblical truth. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins then you've been born into God's family and you have a new nature. You're born of your heavenly father so you have your heavenly Father's nature. Just like human nature from earthly father you have a new spiritual nature from your heavenly father.

Look back to Ephesians 4. **Read verse 17 Then 22-24**

You have a new nature. The Bible calls it the "divine nature," "the one born of God," "the new man". And notice your new nature is created in righteousness and true holiness. Whose righteousness and holiness do you suppose that is? It's God's!

Can we wear the breastplate of our own nature? Yes, we can if it's our new nature. The only way to defeat Satan is for us to live according to our character as God's children.

There is man's righteousness and there is God's righteousness. Every Christian has access to both. Because every Christian has two natures. One we're born with, powerless human good. And the other is God's righteousness that comes from God Himself.

Listen to Romans 3:21, 22 *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested...Even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe.* The writer of Philippians rejoices because he was *...found in him (in Christ) not having my own righteousness which is of the law (my own good works trying to carry out what's right) but the righteousness which is of God by faith.*

If you have received Christ as Savior by faith, then you are clothed in a robe of righteousness, you have the righteousness of God credited to your account in the ledger books of heaven, and you are indwelt by God's righteous nature.

And God says to us in Ephesians 6:14 put on that righteousness which has become a vital part of your life. In other words, let the outworking of the power of God manifest itself in your life. Yield your the parts of your body as instruments of righteousness to God.

Remember this, wherever the weak point is in your armor is, that's the place where you can guarantee Satan will attack. Satan attacks where defects exist.

Wherever it is that you stand in your own strength, wherever it is that you think you don't need

God or maybe don't want God in that area of your life. That's the place where Satan will mount his most forceful offensive.

Think about some of the great people of God in the Bible and you can see how clearly this is illustrated.

David had a flaw in his armor. There was a link missing in his breastplate. He looked down from his rooftop and saw a woman named Bathsheba bathing and he took over from there. His weak point was lust. And instead of turning in the strength of his God and walking away he fell and he fell hard.

Peter's weak point was self confidence. He was always bragging about how he'd always stand with Jesus no matter what and Peter learned the hard way where his trust ought to be. When the pressure was on he cursed and swore and denied he even knew Jesus.

Sampson was another one with defective armor. His problem was selfishness and the more he held on to that aspect of his life and guarded it from God the harder Satan attacked until Sampson's life ended in disgrace.

Let me challenge you with this this morning. Let's try an experiment. Let's role play. If it was your job to ruin your reputation, to hinder your effectiveness for God, to stop your progress in your journey of faith - where would you aim?

Where are you the most vulnerable? Is it some sin you haven't dealt with? Is it some habit you've refused to overcome? Maybe it's an unforgiving spirit, pride; self-confidence, a confusion of values and priorities in your life.

Whatever your thinking of right now, that is your vulnerable spot. That's where Satan going to hit you over and over and over again until he's got you down on the ground. What is your breastplate like this morning? Is it strong and solid, or is it full of holes, cracks, and missing pieces?

Is your life about God and His glory, or is it all about you and what you want, crave, desire?

If you've received Jesus Christ you have the power. Claim it, believe it and use it. Thank God for the victory that He's already given.

If you've never received Christ as Savior then why not do it this morning?

Jesus Christ gave His life - He became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He's made it possible for us to trade in the filthy rags of our own self-righteousness for

the glorious robe of His own righteousness. Are you found in Him today? Is He your Savior?