

Sermon
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West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

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Text: Ephesians 6:10-20

Very often, for most of us, life is a battle.

We feel as if our every move is being watched, we step into traps, we can't allow ourselves to be off guard for even a minute. Because no matter what we do – the arrows keep coming...

The arrows of misunderstanding, discouragement, doubts, injustice, emotional abuse, unfairness, fear, depression, hopelessness... And if we don't make a constant effort to defend ourselves against these arrows, they'll wipe us off the face of the earth.

And please don't get me wrong – this doesn't mean that everything about life is difficult and negative. On the contrary, I think life is mainly beautiful and our days are filled with amazing things, big and small, but... the arrows keep coming. And that sometimes results in us not noticing the nice and special things anymore, because we are constantly defending ourselves in order to survive.

And I think this is true for every single person on earth, believer and non-believer alike. The difference is just that those of us who believe in God,

can be protected against the arrows of life in a very special way. All we need to do is put on the armour of God.

Life might be a battle, but if we wear the armour God gives us, we will be able to move about more freely and safely. And consequently have the time, courage and energy to enjoy the good things around us.

We read about this armour in Ephesians, where the author describes how God keeps us safe using imagery drawn from the kit of the Roman army at that time.

Now the Romans knew a thing or two about battle. They were the best equipped, best trained fighting force in the whole wide world, present in every corner of the empire.

And their armour was very effective in protecting them when they were attacked by their enemies.

Let's take a look at what a Roman soldier wore. There were 3 things a Roman soldier always had on, and these were:

- A belt. The purpose of the belt was to keep their toga from flying all over the place when they were in battle, and it was also where they kept their swords and other necessities they needed to carry with them.
- A breastplate. The purpose of the breastplate was to cover their vital organs – the places where a wound could be fatal.
- Shoes. It's been said that Roman soldiers' boots were the secret of the Roman conquest. They wore open-toed spiked boots that laced up all the way to their ankles. They needed to be able to

move swiftly over all kinds of different terrain when they were in battle, and with these boots on, neither mud nor rocks could slow them down.

Then there were three things a Roman soldier would take up when going into battle, and these were:

- A shield. They had different kinds of shields, but the most effective one was large and almost the same height as their body. It was made of wood and covered with leather. The shield was soaked in water before going into battle, to protect them against the flaming arrows of the enemy.
- A helmet. With all this gear on only a soldier's head still needed to be protected, and that's where the helmet comes in.
- A sword. Everything mentioned up to now was worn to protect the soldier. But with his sword he could actively defend himself and even attack his enemy.

With these 6 things on a Roman soldier was ready for battle, and as protected as he could possibly be.

The message of this passage in Ephesians is that just like a Roman soldier wouldn't go into battle without all the right gear on, we shouldn't go through *life* without the right gear on either.

This shouldn't be hard for us to understand in the day and age we live in, because we live in a regulated society. We follow the rules, because we know that the rules are there for our own benefit.

Look at all the health and safety guidelines we follow, for instance. No construction worker will go into a worksite without a hardhat on, no surgeon will perform an operation without a mask covering his mouth and nose, no parent will drive somewhere with a wee one in the car without putting him or her in a proper car seat...

We keep ourselves safe, not only because that's what society expects us to do, but also because it's for our own good. I don't think anybody will willingly place themselves in a situation where they can get hurt.

I saw this through the eyes of a child when we were on holiday now – because when we were at Typhoon Lagoon, one of the big waterparks in Florida, we queued for a loooong time to go down a flume. But when we got to the top, wee Nehan started crying frantically, he didn't want to go down, he was too scared. So we had to walk all the way back again, in the wrong direction, down what felt like a million steps. Only to notice wee life vests at the bottom where we started queuing. So he put one of these on and wanted to go straight back to the flume that scared him to tears minutes ago, and with the life vest on he couldn't get enough of going down that flume... *This time* he started crying when we said *enough!!*

We go to great lengths to protect ourselves from physical danger, so why not protect ourselves in the same way from emotional and spiritual danger too?

God gives us the armour we need to keep us safe, but it's up to us whether we put it on or not. Let's take a look at what this armour looks like:

- We need to buckle the *belt of truth* around our waists. We need to live honestly, we need to have integrity and be who we are. Pretending to be someone you're not and always trying to keep up appearances can be very hard work and bring you down in a big way.

Just like the Roman soldier's belt tied everything together, living a life of truth will keep us together, it will keep us from falling apart.
- We need to have the *breastplate of righteousness* in place. It is through Christ that we are made righteous; because of what he did for us we are able to turn away from sin.

Just like the Roman soldier's breastplate protected his vital organs, the ability to turn away from sin will protect all the vital areas of our relationship with God.
- We need to have our *feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace*.

Just like the right shoes enabled a soldier to tread on absolutely any terrain, God's peace will give us sure footing, will help us to stand firm, no matter what our situation is.
- We need to take up the *shield of faith*. If we truly believe in God, our faith will be like a protective shield all around us. People can try to hurt us with their words *or* their silence, life can throw unwanted things our way, but none of these things will be able to get the better of us, because our faith will protect us. If we believe in God, we will know that he will keep us safe.
- We need to put on the *helmet of salvation*. In Jesus God saved us. We need to understand that no matter what happens to us here on earth, we'll be safe with God eternally.

- And we need to take up the *sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*. If we ever need to defend ourselves, we've got all the ammunition we need in the word of God.

But just like using an actual sword is something that takes time and practice, we need to spend time to get to know the Word of God, because then we'll get better at using it, at finding and understanding those answers we so very often are looking for.

- But then there is one more thing, something we Christians have that a Roman soldier didn't have, a secret weapon – and that is prayer.

We can talk to God about all our concerns and fears; we can ask him for anything we need. God promises to listen, and to react in the way he thinks appropriate.

So if you think about what all this means – we really don't have to be afraid of anything. If we wear the armour of God, we will be safe and we will be able to defend ourselves, not matter what our situation is.

The reality of life is that those flaming arrows *will* come our way, sometimes without stop and in huge quantities, other times a single arrow comes very infrequently – but we never know when difficult things are going to come our way, so we'll be better off wearing the armour of God all the time, no exception.

The beauty about the armour of God in contrast to the armour of a Roman soldier, is that it's not heavy, so it won't wear us down, it's invisible, so it won't make people look at us funny, but it gives us an inner strength and courage that *will* make other people wonder how we

manage to stay strong in times of adversity and keep smiling when the going gets tough...

So from tomorrow onwards, when you get dressed in the morning and put your shirt, trousers, socks and shoes on, also put on your truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation, and carry the word of God with you like your briefcase, handbag or brollie. Just like you won't go anywhere without clothes on, don't go anywhere without wearing the armour of God.

Every single person who lives in Scotland knows that the weather can change any minute, and therefore we always go out the door prepared. Don't ever step out of your door without wearing the armour of God ever again, and you'll be protected – come rain or shine, devastating news or huge excitement!

God loves us so much that he wants to protect us against the arrows of pain and fear and worries... Let's wear his armour, so we can enjoy the love and laughter and care that are always part of our lives too.

Amen