

2020 1 Thess. 5 - Armor

“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”

Jerry Seinfeld has a great stand up bit about helmets. It goes: “If we want evidence that the human being is not smart, the helmet is my personal favorite. The fact that we had to invent the helmet. Now why did we invent the helmet? Because we were participating in activities that were cracking our heads. So we looked at the situation and we chose not to avoid these activities but to make little plastic hats so that we could continue our head-cracking lifestyles.”

But here the apostle encourages us to wear our helmets! I think because Paul realizes in this broken world that, even if you don't participate in a head-cracking lifestyle as a motorcycle rider or football player, he realizes it's inevitable that head cracking things will come our way. Or, to put it more seriously, I suppose, Paul knows that there will be hardship and battle. Best be prepared for it.

In 2004 a King Arthur movie came out which I thoroughly enjoy, in fact I own it. But the final battle scene always makes me chuckle. Because Guinevere, played by the fetching actress Keira Knightley, joins King Arthur in the battle. She is equipped with a deadly bow and arrow, a few daggers, and, of course, a midriff-spaghetti strap top. Hollywood at its finest! They can't have helmets, they can't

have armor, they have to show off the stars on the big screen! But I imagine the actual combatants in King Arthur's day were dressed a little differently, because that actress' armor, if we can call it that, sure didn't offer a lot of protection from the battle.

I sometimes wonder if we are engaging in spiritual warfare with nothing more than a few strips of cloth as armor. We tell ourselves "I don't have to go to Church or Bible class, We can read the Bible at home." Do you? I hope so, and, even if, is there no instruction to be gained by others? Let alone baptism and communion or food drives and orphanages, don't see a lot of those at home. Or the flipside, we get our "Church quota" in here, saying the right words at the right time, not paying much attention. Then we can go on with our lives for a while. And we think we are equipped for the pandemics, depression, sin, and heartbreak that assaults us? Guinevere was better equipped. And our poor youth. They battle against an onslaught of peer pressure, media, ads, hormones, temptations, doubts and fears. And do they even know their Bible stories? About people who persevered through the same? Or fell short and found a merciful God? We need some armor.

It just so happens I've needed out a bit on armor before, so the reality is that throughout time mankind has always protected itself with shield, armor, and helmet. From boiled leather, to wooden plates, bamboo on Samurais, to the bronze age and beyond. The knights of the medieval period were covered head to toe in

armor. Only siege weapons, fire, nets, or blunt force could take them down. But ultimately, in history, they simply proved too expensive. Why spend so much equipping one knight in shining armor, when you could outfit fifty men with breastplates and helmets? You know, the essentials. You've seen pictures of the romans: arms and legs with bare skin exposed in parts. But then a breastplate and a helmet. Even now, our SWAT teams and soldiers carry vests, sometimes with metal plates, a breastplate to go with their armored helmets.

Because it is no secret the head and the chest are the targets for assault and the most likely to render a kill. If I may cautiously read-into the text a bit today: I imagine the spiritual enemies target the same areas, the head and heart. Let's not take it too far though, Paul certainly talks about the full armor of God in Ephesians 6. And we certainly aware that our hands and other members can cause us to sin. We don't want to overread the text. But just for today let's take a moment to focus on these two, the helmet and breastplate, the head and the heart.

First the head: our heads are bombarded with white noise constantly. Ads on the signs, radios, screens telling us what will make us happier, healthier, what we need, or what is going to doom society and the world. We have a barrage of entertainment which is well enough, but let's not pretend it never de-sensitizes us to an ungodly worldview. If only 10% of the population lives an alternative lifestyle you wouldn't know it by watching TV where every show has them, needs

them. In fact, you would think by watching TV only 10% of the population is happily married. Is it any wonder our children grow up thinking marriage isn't important? This is the slow siege of the white noise. Which also works as a distraction. It's easier to watch a show or entertainer than do a Portals of Prayer. It's easier to have the TV on in the background than take some time to work through the difficult issues or to call that person who is lonely and share the talent our Lord has given us. We can get our children to Church now and then, a few hours a month, but how does that compare to the constant siege of a secular worldview that tells them they are accidents, animals that crawled out of the slime, and that there is no meaning or eternity to anything. And we wonder why they are depressed!? We are fools and we have not equipped them or ourselves for the siege of the white noise. So put your helmet on.

Because it gets worse. The assault has breached the gates like a trojan horse. So while the white noise attacks us from the outside, bitter thoughts poison the well inside the mind as well. "That person did that to me, how dare they!?" We say in disgust. "Sure I did that same thing, but I had my reasons, they didn't!" We stammer. No nuance, no 8th commandment benefit of the doubt, simply our presuppositions labelled on others, "they're bad people." We of course, continue to be "pretty good and if anyone just saw our perspective, they would understand that." Yet we don't want to see anything from someone else's perspective. And the

toxicity blinds us because we weren't ready for battle and we aren't vigilant enough to kick it out.

Let us purge the poison out through repentance and compassion. And let us then, having realized we have been in a battle for longer than we ever realized, let us put on the helmet of the hope of salvation.

And boy could we use some hope. Take a time-out, take a walk, work through some issues, get a plan to fight against them, and then find some peace, and, if nothing else, hear a good Word of the Hope we have in Jesus. The One who triumphs over the world and the grave. Hear something different, a different tone, something that stands out from the white noise. Something that doesn't seek the glory of the world or raise its desires above others. Hear something that fights against the constant assault of depression and meaningless nihilism. Hear about Hope, certain Hope of Salvation. Salvation is life eternal, its being made right, being made new, being washed clean, it's being victorious. Surround your senses with that. With meaning, with purpose, with eternity, with a Savior. And perhaps some courage will come our way. Lord help us.

With our helmets in place to protect our heads. Let us move on to the heart. Hearts pierced with guilt, shame, and grief. We have seen brokenness, we have regrets, we have things we don't like to think on or talk about because we cringe each time.

And we trudge through this world taking wound after wound. We try to help someone and they think we are the bad guy. A relationship is tanking and no matter what we do it just seems to get worse. That person gets sicker and no matter what the doctors do they just seem to get worse. You have to make a tough decision and people hate you for it, even though you had no other good option. And for each funeral, stupid sin, or broken relationship we accumulate arrows that pierce our hearts.

What can we do? Some people withdraw, they are too wounded for more battle so they don't venture into relationships. Some put up walls becoming callous, paranoid, untrusting. But that's not what Paul would have us do. He would have us fight, but well equipped. Equipped with the breastplate of faith and love. Faith guards our hearts, it heals our hearts. So many mistakes, so many regrets, so many broken relationships and hurts, so many battles lost. Well we know the One who will never abandon us, always pulls for us, and was pierced by nail and spear to forgive us! That is the renewal and healing our Lord offers, faith clings to that and says as we do in our confession, "forgive us, renew us, and lead us." The breastplate of faith and love. Faith guards and renews us, love would have us reach out. We don't live in a cave, as tempting as that may be at times, we don't put walls up and never interact. No, with breastplates fixed over our hearts we can walk into this world and be bold to make those relationships to have those tough

conversations, to make those tough decisions, to serve in ways God has called us - at home, work, or here at Church. It won't be without stress, no, but God's love reached out to us, and he fought his battle, we go forth picking up our crosses after him, with courage trusting our King is good, merciful, and that his work, these battles, are important.

So there are some musings on armor here at the end of the Church year. We are engaged in battle whether you like it or not. You can't run from it, you can't hide from it. So you might as well get your gear on. Because what is the alternative? To go it alone? Sure you can sleep in more, might be a little richer, don't have to worry about others so much. But what a selfish and sad place to be? The depression rates prove this, to succumb to the white noise is deadly. And our gospel lesson reminds us, confirms it. Let's face it folks: there is only one way out of this battle alive. And it's with the King. He has gone before us. He heard the lies told about him, he had the friends betray and abandon him. He knows fear, he knows pain, he knows the wrath of the Father and death. Yet he still lives! And he has promised that you, claimed by him in faith and baptism, likewise will live! So let us lift our heads, victory is ours! Why would we ever follow anyone or anything else? In the name of the King. Amen.