

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

18.5.14

The Armour of God – Joss Bray

This week we are going to talk about the armour of God. A lot of us will have read about it and heard teaching on it and discussed it.

However, I want to take a fresh look at it today and see if we can get a new perspective on what Paul wrote about in Ephesians:

EPH 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

So what did that mean to people in Paul's day?

When Paul wrote this, the Romans were the dominant regional force and occupiers of the land. The picture is of a Roman soldier and his equipment.

This would have been very familiar to Paul's audience in Ephesus – something they saw every day. But if you think about it, it is a strange way to illustrate the things of God – he used a picture of something that may generally have evoked feelings in people that may well have been quite negative.

The Jewish people were powerless against the Roman soldiers and they were often very brutal – crucifixion being the ultimate punishment and flogging being common as far as we can tell. They also acted as guards for those in prison – particularly Paul.

But soldiers had faith in Jesus. Jesus commended a particular soldier for much faith and another one got filled with the Spirit.

MT 8:5 When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ... MT 8:10 When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. ¹

AC 10:22 .."We have come from Cornelius the centurion. He is a righteous and God-fearing man, who is respected by all the Jewish people.

So how does this translate to our times?

We have said before two important principles to remember when reading the bible – even though the New Testament was written 2000 years ago and the Old Testament, many years before that, the important things are that 1. God doesn't change and 2. People don't change.

What changes are the things around in the world – and even then, in the big scheme of things, that is not huge. Consider the mountains, the sky the oceans, the earth, the universe – the rest is quite superficial really.

The point is, what was used to illustrate points by Jesus and Paul in parables and letters, was what was known and familiar to the people at the time.

Therefore, it follows, I think that we can legitimately update the picture of the Roman soldier to reflect what is familiar to us now.

The modern soldier:

So picture, if you will, a different sort of soldier – one from today. Think of the pictures on the TV and documentaries, and even friends and family who are in the forces.

Let's update Ephesians 6 to the present time – I believe it is entirely legitimate to do so. For us, it may have the sort of impact that Paul intended, when he used his picture of the Roman soldier.

So how about this – picture a modern soldier standing there:

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the webbing of truth buckled around your waist, with the body armor of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the boots of readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, get into the armored personnel carrier of faith, with which you can stop all the bullets of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the rifle of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Try and get a sense of what Paul's hearers felt – does he really mean we should be like a soldier? Well, there are references to Christians being soldiers –

PHP 2:25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier,

2Ti 2:3 Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

PHM 1:1 To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, ² to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:

Interestingly, nowhere in the New Testament does it actually say we are in God's army. The focus is on something more complete – which is the church. Being a soldier of Jesus Christ is only part of what we are – but clearly important.

So – what are the main points from the picture?

Note first that our struggle is not against people or things or situations – it's about the devil's schemes to bring us down – to wound us and make us ineffective. He can't snatch us out of God's kingdom but he can and does fight against us.

It's God's armour – he freely gives to us. Remember we are under God's grace – which is the unmerited favour - the receiving of what we don't deserve from God. But we have to put it on. We need to know how he equips us and then step into that equipment.

When we step into what God has for us – then we can stand firm - there is a lot of standing here. It isn't about just standing around aimlessly chatting – but about being on guard, alert, ready and braced. Of course the soldier doesn't just stand still – standing means being firm and ready, wherever the battle takes us.

Spiritual warfare that we are involved in isn't necessarily about casting out demons and shouting at the devil. It is actually about the "small" fights we have – even ones unknown to others. It's about standing firm in the face of that temptation that often comes our way (not surprisingly). It's about not getting involved with things that are sinful and dishonour God. It's also about the gospel.

The helmet of salvation is on the head – it reminds us we are saved and secure. Our mind needs to be transformed and be safe in the knowledge that salvation is ours. That deflects the lies of the

enemy that would seek to get inside our head and demoralise and confuse us. If we have confessed with our mouths that Jesus is Lord and believed that God raised him from the dead - that means we have decided to repent and go on a different path to that which we were on. Therefore we are saved – that's what the bible says. Our feelings have nothing to do with whether we are saved or not. God gives us the helmet to keep our head right.

The body armour of righteousness keeps us reminded we are safe in the fact that we are made right with God – by grace. We didn't deserve it but God gave it to us. Our heart and lungs are protected forever so that we can continue to breathe the air of the Holy Spirit and our heart can beat with the love of God.

The webbing of truth – webbing is the stuff that soldiers wear like a belt but with other attachments. It is from this that they hang their equipment and spare ammunition etc. Everything we believe hangs from the truth of the good news of the gospel of Jesus. We learn truth by reading the bible, also from each other and from what the Holy Spirit says to us. If we don't have that webbing of truth, then things fall apart and fall off – then we are not equipped. We have to know the truth – which sets us free. If we have this firmly attached then we are like the soldier who has his hands free to fight – not juggle with all his equipment!

The boots of readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. It's interesting to have peace make up part of a picture of warfare. If we have gospel boots on then we are ready – ready to do what the gospel says – go and be witnesses to all nations and make disciples of all people. If we don't have the boots on – we can't go over the rough and sometimes difficult ground that we have to go to do this. Good boots are comfortable and last. Good boots have grip that makes an impression. Good boots don't let in water and mud which would bog the wearer down and make them less effective. The gospel must not be watered down or obscured – it stands as it is. We need to be comfortable in our gospel boots.

The armoured personnel carrier of faith – perhaps the nearest equivalent of the Roman shields. The Romans locked their shields together to either stay put and withstand arrows or advance and take ground – the equivalent of the function of an armoured personnel carrier. Soldiers now can push forward with the APC – as the Romans did with their shields and then break out and fight.

What about the rifle of the Spirit? - Well, that is what a modern soldier carries. That would be the word of God then - remember elsewhere the word of God is described like this:

HEB 4:12 for the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

So translate that to today -

For the word of God is living and active. Harder hitting than any battle rifle with high velocity ammunition, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

In Hebrews Paul is talking of something visceral, punchy, deep and penetrating. Something powerful and irresistible – the word of God judges what people do and think – deep inside. There is no escape and it cannot be ignored. And it is wielded by us – or to bring us up to date – we are aiming it – it is in our hands to use. Wow – what a privilege and a responsibility. But it is not so good doing what is known as “spray and pray” with this weapon with indiscriminate unaimed bursts, but more like aim carefully and fire. We need to know it and to know how to use it – it is vital for the fight.

And there is one final bit of armour the bible mentions:

It is a call to arms:

RO 13:11 ...The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. ¹² The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

The armour of God has Jesus written all over it. We fight under the banner of Jesus, clothed by him and with him. We fight in the light as he did and the good news is that light wins over darkness every time. The good news is that we are winners whatever happens.

This is the promise:

RO 8:37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.