

The Armour of God - breastplate of righteousness

Who do you say that I am

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[0 : 00] Now open up your Bible to Ephesians 6. So we're coming back to our series on the armor of God. I hope to finish it before I go on holiday.

If you missed the first two sermons, it might be worth just having a listen to those sermons. Send the church office an email and they can send you the call-ins.

There's a really interesting incident in Acts 19, if you know that chapter, where Paul is referred to as a man who's known in hell.

There's an evil spirit that has conquered the Jewish exorcist. And he refers to the fact of this evil spirit.

He says, I don't know who you are. Who are you anyway? He says, I know who Jesus is and I know who Paul is, but I don't know who you are. There's a little bit of humor in that incident, really.

[1 : 03] And somebody commenting on that incident has described the Apostle Paul as a man known in hell. A man known in hell. A marked man, in other words. And that should be every single one of us who is a Christian this evening.

Who is in Christ. If we've been saved, if we have been rescued from Satan's clutches, if we've been translated out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light, then we're marked men and women, boys and girls.

As long as we're unbelieving, as long as we're outside of Christ, as long as we're in Satan's kingdom, well, he doesn't bother about us too much. Do you remember the illustration that Jesus talks about?

He says the good, the armed man, the strong man, he keeps his goods in peace. The devil is not bothered by us as long as we're not believing in Christ.

As long as we're in his kingdom. But the moment we're rescued, the moment that we are saved from his power, we become important to him. We become marked men on his witness.

[2 : 13] To be a wanted man or a wanted woman, to be on a death list, it's a horrible thing, isn't it? We know, don't we, people who are on a wanted list, or they're on a death list, they have to take the appropriate security arrangements.

And we are on a Satan's list list. And so we are to be on our guard. And we are to make full provision of all the security arrangements that God has made.

Think of a policeman in Northern Ireland, during the troubles. I remember being in Northern Ireland, my sister went to university in Belfast, and we stayed at a policeman's house, and every day he would go out, and before he got into his car, he'd have to check in his car, under his car, to see whether there was some device under it.

He'd have to go over different things with a device, because he was on a wanted list, because he was on a hit list. He had to take care to follow all the security arrangements. And so do we.

And so that's what we're looking at, aren't we, in this series. Can you see that again? A little verse 11. Put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand. Verse 13.

[3 : 25] Therefore take up the whole armour of God, again, same thing, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand firm, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth that we looked at last time, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

And so this is the kind of second piece of equipment that God has provided for us, for our protection, the breastplate of righteousness. As an introduction, I really want to stress to you the importance of this piece of equipment.

It's really the centrepiece of Christian armour. We know, don't we, of bulletproof vests. Our police, in the mess, they sometimes wear staff vests.

That is the modern equivalent of a breastplate. And that bulletproof vest will provide protection, and for what we call the vital organs of the body. And so, a soldier, at least when they might get hit in the leg, or the arm, and they'll survive.

But if they get hit in the region covered by the bulletproof vest, or the breastplate, well, they're unlikely to survive. The breastplate covers, doesn't it?

[4 : 29] The vital region, the vital organs of the body. And that's why it's so important. That we are covered by the breastplate of righteousness. Let me put it to you, like this, all the references I'm going to use, there's quite a few of them, are on the sheets that you were given when you came in.

Proverbs 4.23, Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flows the springs of life. And the NIV, I think more helpfully puts it, it says, Guard your heart above all else.

Whatever else you do, or whatever other armour you've got on, whatever other protection you avail yourself of, guard your heart above all else, because it's the well-spring of life. Because out of your heart are the issues of life.

And when the Bible speaks about the heart, it's not speaking about a physical organ that pumps blood around our bodies. When the Bible speaks of the heart of men and women, it's talking about the centre of our personality.

The heart is, according to the Bible, it's the seat of our affections, it's the real you, it's the centre of your thought processes, it's the home of your conscience, it's the spring of all our motives, it's the source of all our desires, it's the fountain of all activities, it's the focus of our personal lives.

[5 : 42] It's us. And the Bible says you have to guard your heart. And it's vital that you guard your heart, because out of the heart are the issues of life. And that is the target that the devil aims at most of all.

That's where the battle will be fought and won. It's not out there somewhere, but in our hearts. It's in the realm, isn't it, of our affections, what we want, and love, of our thoughts, it's in the realms of our conscience, it's in the realm of our motives and our desires.

That's where the battle is fought with Satan. And that is where we most need God's protection. Let's look at it a little bit more closely, you'll see that it's described for us there, isn't it, as the breastplate of righteousness.

Put on the breastplate of righteousness. God's protection for our hearts in the battle against the devil is righteousness.

What do we mean by that? Well, first thing is this. It can't mean our own righteousness. It can't mean our own righteous acts, our own right standing before God.

[7 : 01] When it talks about the breastplate of righteousness, it cannot possibly mean that we put on our own righteousness, because for the very simple reason, we don't have any righteousness.

We don't have any righteousness inherently in God's sight. Do you remember how Romans tells you there is none righteous, no, not one, not in God's sight. I don't mean by this that we're as bad as we could be, that's obviously not true.

There are good things in human nature. And every single one of us has got our good points, but it's all comparative, isn't it? And when we bring our goodness into the light of God's holiness, it looks very tarnished indeed and quite shabby.

And the Bible tells us actually, doesn't it, alarmingly, that our goodness is not goodness at all in God's sight. That actually, as we see our goodness in God's sight, we know that it's full of false motives and pride and vanity and things which other people might say, well, that's really good that you've done that on the outside.

We know that on the inside, if we hunt, there's selfishness and pride. And we don't do things to please God and that's the only motive for goodness.

[8 : 25] There is none really good in this world by nature. There is none righteous. No, not one, says the Apostle. Isaiah says that our righteous acts, they're like filthy rags.

And so if we try to stand before Satan in our own righteousness, it's like standing before him in a string vest full of holes.

And to think that you can stand against the devil trusting in your own inherent goodness is utter madness. There's no protection in your goodness.

And that's crucially important because if you haven't seen this, if you've not seen that, then you're not really even in the battle. If you haven't come to understand that your own righteousness is useless when it comes to your acceptance of God with God that you dare not rely it.

If you haven't been brought to that point to understand that, well, the really alarming truth is tonight you're not in God's kingdom. And you're really still in Satan's kingdom.

[9 : 41] Paul says you've been blinded by him under his control. Doesn't mean you're as bad as you could be but it does mean that you're not in the battle at all and that's crucially important.

Listen to how the Apostle Paul puts it, he gives his testimony in Philippians 3 it's on the sheet and he says in verse 9 he says there was a time when I really thought that I was pretty secure in my own righteousness.

And he describes his own righteousness earlier on in the chapter. He talks about having confidence in the flesh doesn't he right at the start of verse 4. And he says if anyone thinks that they can have confidence before God in the flesh well I can outdo them and he goes on to list the various things that he once trusted in you'll see them there and he relied upon them to put him right with God.

And so verse 5 he says I was circumcised on the eighth day I was of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew of Hebrews as to the law of Pharisee as the zeal well I praise the people of the church as to righteousness under the law blameless.

And then he says verse 9 not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but that which comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God that depends on faith.

[11 : 02] So he describes his goodness his background his upbringing his religious duties his decency his honesty his morality and having described all that he comes to say all that is useless.

All that is useless. He says these things I thought they were gained to me verse 7 but actually they are not. I was counted on these things to get me to heaven I thought these were the things that would bring me right with God but now I see that these things they'll never do that for me.

So verse 7 but whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I covered the loss of all things and covered them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law. not having a doing yourself religion.

No he says I know that there's nothing I can do to stand me in good stead at all. That's all I want. What I want he says is a righteousness which is of God which comes through faith.

[12 : 15] And that is the righteousness that I need and that is the righteousness that you and I need if we're going to stand before the enemy. It's a bulletproof righteousness.

Your own righteousness is not bulletproof it's full of holes. But the righteousness he describes here the righteousness of God which is in Jesus Christ and it comes to us by faith in Christ is well invulnerable to Satan's accusation.

It's bulletproof on the evil day. And as soon as you be brought to this point your heart well it's just wide open to the devil. You're still in enemy territory.

And if you're trusting in your own righteousness you're in very dangerous territory. So this righteousness that the apostle Paul is talking about in the Ephesians 6 it's not our own righteousness.

So what is it? If this righteousness is God's provision for our protection against Satan if it's not our own righteousness what is it? Where does it come from? What Paul tells us doesn't he?

[13 : 21] It is the righteousness of God and how does it come? By faith in Jesus Christ. There are two things that I'm going to say tonight about this righteousness and I'm going to use technical terms.

I don't apologise for that. I think we need to stop apologising for theological technical terms. We need to explain them. The message of the gospel has technical terms.

It's not our business to dumb them down. Have you bought a laptop? Have you bought a laptop? When you're going to buy a laptop do you understand what the specifications are?

I haven't got the farthest clue, isn't it? You haven't got a clue what they are and neither are you. But if you're going to buy a laptop and it's a decent laptop and you're more diligent than I am you will go and you'll research those terms because those terms matter.

You take the trouble to find out what the spec is. But we're dealing with something tonight that's far more important than you buying a laptop or a phone or whatever it is.

[14 : 26] We're dealing with your eternal destiny. Your never dying soul. Your safety. And so what we're dealing with tonight is more to you personally. It's very, very important indeed. So I'm not apologising for using technical terms.

What is this righteousness? What is this protection that God provides for our hearts against Satan's attack? It's not ours.

What is it? It is God's righteousness provided for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And it comes to us by faith. What is it? Number one, it's imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness.

Let's go back to the reading we have from Zechariah 3. There's a really, really vivid illustration. It's a really lovely illustration tucked away in the Old Testament in Zechariah.

The prophet recounts this remarkable vision that he had. And in that vision, he sees Joshua, Israel's high priest, standing before the angel of God. And when told him, can you see verse 1? Then he showed him Joshua, the high priest, standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan, standing at his right hand to accuse him.

[15 : 33] That's a brilliant summary of what the devil does. Nothing could describe more eloquently what the devil does to a Christian. The Bible calls the devil the accuser of the brethren.

It's one of the titles that the Bible gives it. He's an accuser. And when we, like Joshua, stand in the presence of God and we're longing to know God more, and to fellowship with God, the devil comes alongside us and he points the finger at us and he accuses us.

And the effect of that can be devastating, can't it? He dredges up our past. He brings before us our sin and he says, you, how can you expect God to hear your prayers?

And there's many of us that have stopped praying and we've stopped reading our Bibles for a time precisely because of this, because the devil comes alongside us. And when we open up our Bibles and when we come to pray, these thoughts, how can someone like you expect to have fellowship with God?

You're wasting more time. How can you ever expect to cross the threshold into God's presence? Don't you remember you did this yesterday? Don't you remember you did that and he accuses us and he points the finger at us and we think, oh, let's just do anything else other than this.

[16 : 53] There is practice. He is the accuser with the brethren. Now, what do you do in a situation like that? How do you handle the accusations of the devil? Well, you put on the breastplate of righteousness. What does that mean?

We'll look at Zechariah 3. It's beautiful. We're told that Satan stood alongside Joshua to resist him and accuse him before God.

Look at verse 2. And the Lord said to Satan, the Lord rebuke you, O Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you.

Is not this a brand I have plucked from the burning, from the fire? God says to the devil, I am the one who has chosen you.

I am the one who has chosen this man. I chose to save him or her. He or she is a brand plucked from the fire. And then you read these beautiful words. Verse 3. Now Joshua was standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments and the angel said to those who were standing before him, remove the filthy garments from him.

[18 : 01] And to him he said, behold, I have taken your iniquity, your sin, that which is within you, which is walked and always going towards sin. I have taken that away from you and I will close you with pure vestments, pure garments.

That's what we mean by impurity is righteousness. It's all of this. It's his righteousness given to us in purity to us. And the moment we believe in him, the moment we trust in him, our filthy garments are taken away from us and his perfect, spotless righteousness is put on us instead.

That's the heart of the gospel. The gospel is more than that but that's at the heart of it. It's what we call justification by faith. There's a transaction that takes place and it takes place in the courts of heaven.

It doesn't take place in our experience. Justification is not an experience. It is a legal act that takes place the moment we believe on Christ, the moment we rely on Christ, the moment we lean heavily upon him, there is a transfer and our filthy garments, the garments of our sin, our spotted righteousness and our filthy garments they're taken from us and they're put to his account.

And he who knew no sin was made sin for us. That we might be made to the righteousness of God in him.

[19 : 34] Upon a life I did not live. Upon a death I did not die. Another's life, another's death, I stake my whole eternity. That is the breastplate of righteousness.

And to put it on is to understand it. To put on the breastplate of righteousness is to know that you are right with God. That's the only way you can stand up to the accusations of Satan. When he comes dreading up your past and points into your failures it's the only way you can meet him. It's to put on the breastplate of righteousness that is to be saved from Satan's accusation. Martin Luther, the great German when there was the Reformation he said that this article this kind of truth, this doctrine it was the article of a standing or falling church. Certainly what Christians stand or fall. It's where the battle is won or lost against the devil. And do you see how important this is? So many of the spiritual problems we have as Christians especially problems of assurance are due to the fact we've not put on the breastplate of righteousness. We've not understood the doctrine of justification by faith. And if you're a Christian you are justified but unless you understand what that means unless you get it or if you forget what that means then you are a prey to the enemy and it happens in lots of different ways.

[21 : 04] So what happens is Christians begin to trust in their feelings. It's so important to have feelings. I want to say if you've never felt anything in your Christianity there's something very wrong with that.

I can't understand how anyone can come to God through Jesus Christ and understand that they're being saved from sin and come into fellowship with God and not feel anything.

I don't understand that. It's ridiculous. You're bound to feel something. Aren't you? And feelings are very important but feelings make a really poor breastplate. And because feelings well they're here today and they've gone tomorrow eh.

And if you rely on your feelings this evening the devil will really make short work on you because before you go home tonight you'll be filled with doubts and anxieties because your feelings come and go like mine do and they change with the weather.

Maybe you're trusting in some past experience I was in a meeting recently where somebody called a gypsy smith the evangelist and he used to say to people I know I'm a Christian because I was there when it happened.

[22 : 15] And that sounds spiritual but it isn't right. We know what it means but the devil makes short work of that.

If you trust in some past experience then the devil will come to you and what will he say? He'll say to you well it's not just psychological. He can point you to any number of people who had a similar experience Christians.

And they don't even pretend to be Christians. And if you're trusting in your experience that is no protection. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand all by the ground and the sinking side. That's the breastplate of righteousness.

That's what it means to put on the breastplate of righteousness. I don't trust in my feelings. I thank God for feelings and I thank God for experiences but I don't trust in them.

[23 : 24] They're not my hope. My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. When the devil comes and he attacks your conscience and he will and Satan comes to you and he accuses you of not being a Christian how can you be a Christian?

And the devil tempts you to despair. He does. And so when Satan tempts me to despair and he tells me of the guilt within and he just sent me up where I look.

That's where you look. Up where I look. Not inward. Up where I look and see him who made an end of all my sin. Because the sinless saviour died.

My sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me. And when the devil comes in he says how can you possibly call yourself a Christian?

What do you say to him? You say to him I know I'm a sinner. That's what it's all about. God knows I'm a sinner. So can't promise me about that. You're absolutely right devil. I am a sinner but I've got a saviour.

[24 : 36] And what's happened is his perfect spotless life has been put to my account and my filthy life has been transferred and put down to him. That's the breastplate of righteousness.

I'm going to put it on. And the Bible says it's the most important thing of all. And the battle against the devil is to know that you're right with God and to know why you're right with God. Not just the

hope that you are.

So many Christians you ask them are you going to heaven? Are you saved? I say well I hope so. You must know sir. You must know what the breastplate of righteousness is all about. To know that you're right with God. To have confidence to meet the enemy.

To have confidence to go out and face him. Because you know that the sin issue in your life. The unrighteousness issue in your life. Has been dealt with perfectly and fully forever. In the life and death of Jesus.

[25 : 34] Listen to how John puts it in Revelation 12. John said like you had a loud voice in heaven saying now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down.

Who accuses them day and night before God and they have conquered him. By the blood of the Lamb. And by the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Therefore rejoice O heavens and you who dwell in them but woe to your earth and see for the devil has come down to you in great wrath because he knows his time is short. They overcame it. And the accuser of the brethren is cast down.

They overcame it. How did they overcome it? By the blood of the Lamb. That is the breastplate of righteousness. The righteousness of Jesus Christ puts to our account the moment we believe in him.

And our sinfulness imputed to him. So that now we believe. the righteousness that God provides us in our fight against the devil is not our own.

[26 : 48] We can never stand up against the devil's attack. And we can never stand up to the scrutiny of a holy God. And so this righteousness, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us.

Provided for us in the life and death of Jesus. It becomes ours by faith. Don't believe it. You go to the pub, you're leaving in the pub with your friends. And one of your friends sets up a tab.

It's very generous. And so you go to the bar and the barmaid says that'll be £20 for two pints or whatever ridiculously it is. And she says that'll be £25.

And you say, what do you say? You say, oh, put it on the tab. You put it on his tab. And your friend, at the end of the night, he picks up the tab. Put it to our account.

And that's what Christ has done. He has put us into his account. This perfect life has been put to our account, imputed righteousness. But that righteousness which is ours in Christ, and I'll try and be brief here, is also imparted to us, secondly, by the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 05] The righteousness which is ours in Christ, which is put to our account, is also imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. And you must never separate those two things.

You must never separate imputed righteousness and imparted righteousness. They belong together. And they're woven together in this breastplate. To put it doctrinally, you must never separate justification, that God declares us right because of Christ's righteousness, with sanctification, which is being set apart and increasingly set apart for God.

Where there's one there, there has to be the other. And so the person who has been put right with God will begin to live righteously before him.

That's part of our protection too. And so James, in his official, he tells us, can we see that? He says, resist the devil. He doesn't incidentally tell you to rebuke the devil.

How many were ever told that? And he says, resist the devil. And you may say, well how on earth can I resist the devil? We're not talking about a comic strip figure. He's not a cartoon character with horns and hooves and a tail.

[29 : 21] We're talking about the one in the Bible who's described as the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who is now aware in those who are disobedient. I'm no man for him. Can I read you? Well yes you are, says James.

Look what it says. It says, resist the devil. And you can resist it. And you can see him fleeing from you.

How is that possible? Well listen to this, verse 7 and 8. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands you sinners and purify your hearts you double minded.

You see resistance to the devil, it grows out of Christian living. You see you will not see him run away from you unless you are living righteously before God.

Unless you are submitting to God, unless you're drawing near to God. Unless you're cleansing your hearts and purifying, cleansing your hands and purifying your hearts. When Peter describes the devil, can you see it?

[30 : 32] He's like a roaring lion who wanders about seeking whom he may devour. And what does Peter say? Peter says resist him. Stand against him. How can I resist a roaring lion?

How can I do that? I'm no match for a roaring lion. Well yes, you are, the Bible says. Because look at that last verse, it's a beautiful proverb isn't it? The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.

There's guilt for you, isn't there? Let's start with that verse. There's guilt for you. A man who is guilty, a man whose sin has not been dealt with by the blood of Christ, and that man runs when no one is chasing him.

He's always looking over his shoulder. He knows there's someone attacking him, but actually there's no one attacking him at all. That's how you recognise guilt. The wicked flee when no one is chasing them, but the righteous will be as bold as a lion.

And so those of you who are in Christ, you are more than a match for Satan. And if you are trusting in the righteousness of Christ, and if you are living that justified life, living righteously before God, by the Spirit you can stand.

[32 : 05] And you can resist. And you can see the devil running away from you. And so therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand in the evil day, having done all to stand firm, stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Heavenly Father, we