**Genesis 3:1-7**

**Ephesians 6:10-24**

**Title: “Oiling the Whole Armor of God**

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Remember “Heard on the Wind,” the humorous column in the *Skagway News* that reported funny or downright stupid comments made by tourists visiting our town? If you have regular contact with tourists in the summer, you know they can try your patience. Are you always kind or generous to people who want to tell you in great detail how wonderful a trip up to the pass was? What’s worse, they’re telling you as if you had never seen or done those things yourself. If that happens once a day for four or five months, you are called upon to exercise a whole lot of patience and kindness before the last cruise ship leaves town in September.

That’s pretty minor, isn’t it, compared to the patience, kindness, love and compassion we have to practice at home, at work, at church. Yet that’s exactly how Paul says we are to live as Christians. I don’t know about you, but I often find it tough to live this way.

For the last five weeks, Matt and Jan told us how Paul, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, explained and described to those brand new Christians what it would mean to follow Jesus and how to live as a Christian community in a hostile world. Life was going to be very different, with radically different values and ways of acting. Paul was church planting. He wanted to make sure these first churches were starting out on the right foundation.

So in the first five chapters of Ephesians Paul lays out core Christian doctrine. He describes how these churches should be formed, and the new way of life Christians are called to. He made sure they knew we are saved by grace, not works, and that Jews and Gentiles both have been redeemed by Christ’s death and resurrection, and adopted into God’s family. We are people God chose to bless; we can’t work our way into his family. Our purpose as God’s children is to praise and worship God. The radically different way we are called to live will show the wider world outside of the church that God is alive, real and very present in his people’s lives.

Paul also describes how relationships should be conducted. As we grow in spiritual maturity we must practice more and more humility, gentleness patience, love, peace, kindness, compassion and forgiveness. As the song says, they will know we are Christians by our love. In the church community Christians would encourage each other in this new life. Christian men and women could grow to maturity in such an encouraging community. And - the way they live would be a powerful witness to the world. So Paul tells them, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up. . . .Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as Christ forgives you.” (4:29) Matt called this the “language of encouragement.” It creates a people set apart, a peaceful and nurturing church community where people learn their Christian vocation. Paul describes relationships between employers and employees, husbands and wives, and parents and children that are based on these qualities.

What a wonderful way to live! Yet, as we all know, it’s often a struggle to be spiritually mature and live the life Paul describes in Ephesians. It’s tough to be loving, patient, compassionate or forgiving. It just doesn’t come naturally, and so, we fall short. Many temptations and troubles rush at us from all sides, at home, at work, over coffee at the Sweet Tooth, down on the street when the tourists are here. Paul’s answer is that we must put on the whole armor of God and pray continuously in all circumstances. The armor is how God enables us to stand firm as we follow his calling for us in this world. Prayer is the oil that helps us keep that armor in good condition.

Armor?! Why do we need armor? Armor is for soldiers in battle facing a dangerous enemy. What enemies do we face in our daily lives? Surely for us armor is overkill. Eugene Peterson writes about the evil that surrounds us. It’s very subtle. Satan has a million ways of undermining us in our life of faith. Evil is everywhere. It’s often so disguised that we may spend a lot of time and energy always being afraid and on guard because we don’t know what’s going to happen next. Or we may give up and give in, feeling that we can’t do much about it anyway. That’s way to live. Joy and peace go out the window.

When I first lost vision in my eye from a detached retina I spent a lot of time being very afraid. God was with me; I knew that, but for months I struggled with the battle in my mind. My mind is where Satan attacks me most often. I worry and fret, and am anxious. Satan moves in and has me imagining all sorts of things. Then I get paralyzed and it just gets worse from there. During that time my cousin Linda told me she had been diagnosed with endometrial cancer. I was stunned. I offered my support. She simply said, “He is the great Physician.” That was the only comment she ever made about it. Her faith has been a great inspiration to me - a simple statement of faith that said “I don’t have to worry about it because God’s got my back.” Because she knows he is the great Physician, she is free, free to share her life with her family, her music students and her beautiful garden. Satan could not undermine her faith because she has God’s mighty power as her strength. By putting on the whole armor of God we all are free to live because we know God’s got our backs. We don’t have to think about it. God’s mighty power supports us.

In Ephesians 6:10 Paul tells us to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” by putting on the whole armor of God. This armor will protect and enable us to live out our calling in Christ without worrying or being always on guard. We can live with joy and peace knowing that the armor will help us stay the course. It enables us to be steadfast, to keep our balance in a world where evil is everywhere and hard to identify.

Here’s how I imagine it working. Imagine a tall, strong, deep-rooted tree. When strong winds blow, that tree will bend and bow and sway under the force. Branches may snap off, but the tree withstands the winds because it’s deep-rooted. The winds blow around and over it. The tree bends but doesn’t break. Imagine a swollen river rushing over and around this tree. It’s pushed to its limits but the water can only rush around it because it’s firmly rooted. When you wear the armor you’re like a deep-rooted tree. Evil comes at you, attacking your mind, your heart, your body, your home and family, your work. It hurts, but you don’t think twice about the fact that God has your back. It hurts, but you are not destroyed. Remember Job. Job knew who God was and never doubted that God was real.

So where does the heavenly battle between God and the devil take place? For us, in the mundane routines of everyday life. Paul has been talking about marriage, family and workplace - how to live. Now he says, to be able to do this, put on the armor. This routine of daily life is where Satan attacked Adam and Eve. We are most vulnerable in our day-to-day living because it’s there we are most unaware and unsuspecting – it’s not a grand, cosmic drama in the heavens. “It is in marriage, parent-child relations and the daily working world that we need to recognize we are not dealing merely with flesh and blood but, as Paul says, with ‘rulers. . . authorities . . . cosmic forces . . . spiritual forces of evil.’” 6:10

How will we be able to stand against such a deceiver as Satan? We need the armor because of Satan’s devious power - he is tricky, manipulative, maneuvering, seductive, as he was in the Garden of Eden. We don’t have the power to fight what we don’t even clearly see in everyday life. John Ferguson stresses that our job is not just conflict management. This is a personal contest to the death against Satan who wants to separate us from God. We don’t “wrestle against flesh and blood,” Paul says. But by putting on the armor of God, we can be “strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”

So - first, Paul says, put on the belt of truth, which is the truth of the Gospel. The truth of the Gospel holds everything together and in place. (Wright 74)If you know the truth, which is in God’s word, you don’t second-guess yourself or think twice. You are sure of where you stand; you can ask for prayer and help from others who also wear the belt.

The breastplate protected the Roman soldier’s vital organs, and protected him from fatal wounding. We Christians have been justified or made righteous by Christ’s death and resurrection. We are already protected. We may be wounded by Satan’s darts, but we will never die because we have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. Knowing this, believing him, we can stand firm. (Ferguson 181)

Next, Paul says, have feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of peace. “Sandals were the sign of one equipped and ready to move.” Barclay 183) “The enemy will do all he can to knock us off our feet. Daily reading and remembering the gospel will make us ready, like good shoes or boots would do, to stay upright.” (Wright 74) We are able to keep our feet, able to move quickly. Being securely grounded in the gospel makes us ready for any situation. (Ferguson 181) We have good shoes that fit well.

Next is the shield of faith. The word Paul uses to talk about the shield of faith is the word for a large, door-sized shield Roman soldiers carried into battle. Imagine Roman soldiers braced together behind raised shields. This Roman legion would be a solid wall of defense against the enemy. Paul calls Christians to stand together with their faith shields forming a solid, unified front against the poison darts of Satan. Not only is our faith a solid shield for each one of us, but where we are weak on our own, we are strong when we help each other. It’s encouraging to know that we are part of a larger church in the battle against Satan. Standing firm means standing together in faith. (Wright 73-74)

We have this shield because we believe. We have complete, unquestioning loyalty to Jesus. This unquestioning, believing loyalty means we don’t have to think twice. We don’t need to analyze or question or wonder what’s right or what to do. We stand firm, because our faith tells us that Jesus has already defeated evil and the kingdom is coming in. Satan will try to undermine us with discouragement, doubt or despair; difficult, painful circumstances; temptations of all kinds; personal tragedy. He might even tempt us to become arrogant or prideful over some accomplishment. “***Believing loyalty*** to Jesus helps get us through. (Wright 74-75)

Again, remember Job. He refused not to believe, even though in his dark suffering he couldn’t understand or see the end of it. Job had complete, believing loyalty in the goodness and reality of God.

 What keeps us going when we’re discouraged and evil is all around us? Paul says to put on the helmet of salvation. The hope of salvation keeps us focused on God. By his death and resurrection, Jesus has already accomplished everything needed for us to be in God’s family. The work is done; we have the hope of salvation. So when the devil attacks our minds with lies or despair or fear, we know we have the helmet of salvation firmly in place. Like Job, we may suffer, but we will prevail because of our faith. We must keep looking straight at Jesus, like Peter when he walked across the water toward the Master. He could do it as long as he didn’t waver, didn’t look to the right or the left. We must study and remember and review the specific truths of the gospel that will keep us going when the spiritual pressure is overwhelming. We are already in the family of the risen Messiah and so are already rescued from the enemy. (Wright 75) Let’s remember this truth and so stand firm.

And finally, Paul says, take the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. We attack with God’s word – God’s truth. Christians must develop a mind that is filled with God’s promises and God’s word. Psalm 119:11 instructs us to “store up” God’s words in our hearts.

 The armor of God works because we know God’s word completely and believe him. We know who God is and what he has done and will do again. If his word is stored up in our hearts, then it is second-nature to act according to his truth. We decide what to do, we choose how to treat people, we know what is right and wrong because God’s word is rooted deeply in us. We become like the deep-rooted tree – we sway and bend, but return to an upright position because God’s word is our compass in life.

 And we pray. We put on the whole armor of God and we pray. How can we stand firm when so many things pull us away? Paul says pray, pray continuously and in all circumstances. Pray when you open your eyes in morning; pray when you go to bed; pray when you can’t sleep in the middle of the night. Pray by yourself and for yourself about all things no matter how mundane. Remember – Satan attacks in the mundane places; pray for your family and friends and the many needs of Skagway and the world. Pray for President Trump. Pray with each other and for each other. Send prayers of thankfulness and worship and praise to God. Pray everywhere and in all things. Live a life of prayer. As children of God prayer is the act that fuels our life together in the church, and keeps God present and alive to each of us in all circumstances.

Otherwise, Satan will move in. He is waiting and actively trying to move in and take God’s place in our lives. Let’s oil the armor of God with our prayers. God has promised that if we keep focused on him, if we stand firm, he will not leave us alone in our weakness to fight the forces of evil alone. When you lose your temper with your friend or neighbor, Satan is overjoyed and waiting to move in to tempt you do worse. But we know, because God says so, that we can pray and be forgiven, and make it right with that person. That’s how the armor works. Satan can’t do his worst with us because God through Jesus has already done his best. We are his adopted children and he will fight for us, has already fought for us and won.

In verse 18 Paul pretty much defines the life of prayer he urges us to practice. It is a life *focused* on God and characterized by prayer. Prayer is a way of life. So how should we live as a church, a Christian community? We should pray continuously, in all circumstances, about all things, for ourselves and all the saints, asking the saints to pray also for us. (v 18). Prayer is a way of life.

So Matt asked us to think about who are we at SFP church. What is our calling? After prayerfully studying Paul’s passionate vision for Christian living, This is what I’ve come up with. But it’s not finished yet. There’s room for many more paragraphs to be written. You must write your version to add to the whole, and I must write mine. How will live it out in my everyday life? How will you live it out? Here’s the beginning: even though each of us has a separate calling ordained by God, we also have an identity as the church. We are the people of God who wear the armor of God and so stand firm and able to do God’s will and his work in our community and the world beyond. We wear the armor of God by faith because we know who God is and that his promises are true. No matter what our struggles are, we know his love and care for us are boundless. Unless we choose to walk away from God and his family, this is our identity. This is who we are, our reality. Everything we do and say tells our neighbors who God is and what his incoming Kingdom is all about.