

How Are You Clothed?

Isaiah 11:5, Romans 15:13, Matthew 3:2-4

A group of us did this Bible Study many years ago on the Armor of God. We studied the passages that told us what the armor was and we even made “paper dolls” of ourselves, clothed in God’s Armor. It was a powerful study.

So, when I read today’s passages, I remembered that study, especially Isaiah 11:5 ... *Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.* And Matthew 3:4 ... *Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.* That’s how John presented himself to the world.

How do we present ourselves to the world? I’ve told my children to always strive to be the person they most want to be and that they want the world to know them as, because we never know who is looking.

Without putting on some kind of a fake act, we have to be aware of our words, our actions – even our facial expressions.

Pause and think before speaking. Does what I am about to say help anyone? Stop the gossiping. If we need to reprimand a child, do it calmly ... and privately if at all possible. Speak gently and humbly. Say please and thank you.

Don’t take something that isn’t yours. Hold the door for the person coming behind you. Smile. If you aren’t in pain, don’t make faces like you are. If someone tells you about something they thoroughly enjoy – but you do not – don’t grimace like you find something disgusting. As Eileen would say, “Don’t yuck someone’s yum!”

I should always show Toby respect and he should respect me, even when we disagree. We should always treat each other with love, patience and kindness, even when we’re tired and hungry. Being in public or not shouldn’t, change how we are with each other.

But ... we, as Christians, must always remember that people are watching. Too often “they” want to catch us up on not being who we say we are. “They” think we’re supposed to be perfect. “They” are looking at us to see if we really have the faith we say we do; to see if we really strive to be like Jesus.

We never know who is watching, so we have to remember that our lives reflect our faith in Jesus. So, how are you clothed?

In the Matthew passage, John the Baptist, clothed in camel’s hair, is announcing to everyone that “*the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.*” He’s telling them that the Savior they were awaiting has arrived and they needed to repent from their sin, from their evil ways; they needed to prepare the way for the Savior’s arrival.

We know that when Jesus arrived as a baby in the manger, things were difficult. Joseph heard in a dream that he was to take his family and escape to Egypt, because Herod was looking for Jesus and wanted to kill Him. Satan and sin thrived on earth then, as it did when John announced Jesus’ coming, and as it still does now.

BUT! The Holy Spirit gives us the strength to fight Satan. Satan is shrewd. He is all evil. He attacks our faith, especially in our times. He uses people and ideas and things against us. He causes us to be divided in anger. He creates division in our churches. He causes true Christian fellowship to be attacked. He causes us to be rude to each other, to strike out in anger when that’s not who we really want to be.

Before we can stand against Satan, we need to know how he works, how he divides brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, friends and neighbors. We need to know that flaming arrows are shot at us by all that is evil. We will be tempted by false doctrine and by the desires of the flesh. We will be called to battle against wickedness.

God, though, has given us a perfect armor to protect ourselves against Satan. We have been given truth, righteousness, the Gospel of peace, faith, salvation and the Word of God. Isaiah tells us to wear righteousness around our waist and faithfulness around our loins.

In Ephesians, Paul tells us to arm ourselves and to stand firm, to stand strong, to stand our ground, to “*stand against the devil’s schemes.*” It’s a spiritual battle – good against evil – within ourselves and in the world. We stand against Satan, because Jesus has already won the battle! We stand on that promise.

In your bulletins today I’ve included a lovely piece of art that I found. Use it as a reminder of our armor.

So what is that armor?



First we are told to buckle the **belt of truth** around our waists. I think about the boys who believe wearing their pants below their butts is cool – they need a belt to hold up those pants, to prevent them tripping on their jeans!

What are these truths held close to us by the belt – to stop us from tripping? Over simplified: God is real. God loves you. Jesus died for your sins. God is on your side.

When we hold on to truth, it will hold us up, keeping us strong against Satan's attacks. Our decisions and our behavior should be based on the truths found in God's Word. When we start our day filled with the truth of His Word, we are prepared for every decision we face.

John 8:31-32 tells us, "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My Word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" When we know God's truth, when we live by God's truth, we won't be tripped up by the battles of life. We are to tell the truth, being honest, always.

Next comes the **breastplate of righteousness**. The breastplate is a piece of leather armor meant to protect all the vital organs in our torso, most importantly – our hearts.

Simplified, we are to do what is right and good. We aren't righteous on our own – that's something given to us by God. Isaiah 64:6 says, "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags" and Romans 3:23, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

That's why Romans 5:17 gives us such a wonderful promise, "For if, by the trespass of one man [Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ." We are not righteous by following the law, but by our faith in Jesus Christ.

With God's power, we are to live a life of righteousness. If we don't let sin creep into our lives, there will be nothing Satan can grab. We cannot be brought down by guilt. We can stand straight and tall, glorifying God.

What female doesn't like a great pair of shoes? But they'd better be sturdy and able to support us. My "great pair of shoes" these days have no heels, have a deep tread, and aren't all that pretty.

Our whole bodies depend on the health of our feet and the fit of our shoes. Roman soldiers had nails in the bottom of their sandals so they could stand firmly, with no worrying of slipping.

So next we fit our feet with the **shoes of readiness**, of the gospel of peace – that's today theme. We have to be ready to go wherever God sends us, and what we place on our feet determines our ability to go out to tell the Good News of God's amazing love for each of us.

We must be ready to stand up for what we know is true; to flee from places we shouldn't be; to do anything to serve God; to share the truth of God's peace and love with all those God places in our path. We are to be well-grounded in God's Word, in the foundation of our faith. We are to speak peace, not anger or arguments.

A few years ago, Tyler received a fantastic bow from my dad. I know he'll never be shooting arrows at a person, but it helps me imagine a flaming arrow being shot from Satan's bow towards me.

The **shield of faith** will protect us from anything Satan shoots our way. Our faith, our belief in God, gives us His perfect and permanent protection. It never fails.

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Our faith lets us stand in battle no matter the odds we face. Without faith – we cannot serve God.

Our faith saves us; it heals us; it becomes stronger and more beautiful as time goes by. Not only does our faith protect us from the flaming arrows flung our way by Satan, it also puts the arrow's fire out. We are shielded by our faith in God.

Whenever I go out on my scooter, I wear a helmet. Helmets protect our brains and save lives. The **helmet of salvation** is what saves us from eternal death. In Romans 1:16, we hear, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Salvation is a gift from God. 1 Peter 1:9 tells us: *“For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* When you believe in Jesus Christ – you are saved. You are a child of God. Satan has already lost the battle; death is defeated and nothing can ever take you away from God. This is the promise of our Savior.

When we have accepted Jesus, we are assured of our salvation and Jesus lives within our hearts. The helmet of salvation protects our minds from the attack of Satan. He can't get into our heads and make us doubt. He cannot make us behave in ways that shame God.

Lastly, we are to take up the **sword of the Spirit**. We must have something to fight back against Satan's lies. The helmet protects, but the sword is strong, too. Our sword is God's Word – the Bible. When we know God's Word, we can take the lies that Satan throws at us and slice them to pieces.

When Jesus was in the desert, tempted by Satan, He used God's promises to fight back. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3: *‘It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’*”

By the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit, we must learn and retain God's Word. If our memories aren't quite as good as they used to be, have your Bible handy.

Colossians 3:16 tells us to, *“Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.”* Satan knew Scripture, too – he just didn't obey it. If we believe in God's promises, if we live by God's Word, if we obey God's command – we are protected. Read God's Word. When Satan attacks, we will have just the right words to protect us because the Holy Spirit will bring those words back to our minds.

And we are to pray. Pray always. Pray for each other. Pray with all kinds of prayers and requests.

Continue to be connected with God. Prayer destroys our enemy. In Matthew 26:41, Jesus told us to *“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Jesus told us to be persistent in our prayers.

Think about how you are dressed, how you present yourselves to this world. “Put on Christ” every day. Be bold, be strong, for the Lord your God is with you and with God's power, we can stand firm against anything Satan might throw at us, against the forces of evil that try to divide and destroy us!

Remember that our lives, our faith, our love may be only the chance for someone to see Jesus in this world. Clothe yourself so you give God glory with your witness and your life.

And as Paul wrote to the Romans in Chapter 15:13 ... *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*