

Sermon – Sunday 22nd August 2009 – 10.00am Service:

Our Diet can help us Stand Strong:

John 6: 59-68 & Ephesians 6:10-18:

I like many people enjoy my food and as such I am a little rounder than I would like – thankfully this is changing as I learn better eating habits. There are many who like me tend to eat too much of the wrong type of foods and so we become what we eat. This can cause the problem for our physical bodies of being over weight plus susceptible to other medical type issues. So what we eat can help us be strong or weak and susceptible to illness or disease.

The same is with our spiritual bodies. What we put in can affect the way we react and relate to other people and to God. If we read or watch too much anger and violence it has been shown that our personalities can change along those lines and thus can affect our relationship with our family and friends. Filling our lives with business so that we do not spend enough time feeding on the bread of life, the scripture, or in personal prayer time with God can also affect our relationships especially with God and if we are not careful spiritually weak and vulnerable to attacks of the enemy and spiritual disease.

Thus once again we become what we eat – take in.

Paul in Ephesians tells us that we need to daily put on our spiritual armour and exercise our faith in Jesus, which we do as we live in our relationship with God and as we feed on the bread from heaven.

Also in Paul's Letter to the Romans we read: "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*"

When we initially think of armour do we not think of warriors of old dressed for battle? This is the picture Paul is drawing from for he would have been used to seeing the Roman Legions and how they dressed. It is recorded that the Sumerians who lived in Mesopotamia, where Abraham came from, were the first people to wear helmets and heavy leather coats to protect them in battle. The heavy coats were the first armored suits. Armies since then have used armour and it is evident that armour was always intended to be worn during wars. Armor was not to be worn to a picnic, a family reunion, or a party.

When I think of armor, I normally think of the knights of old, King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, King Richard 1st and those of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in France, Germany and England where armor was so highly developed. The Knight would wear a helmet, to protect his head. Covering his shoulders is the pauldron; covering his lower arms is the vambrace; covering his hands are the gauntlets. All of these are French words. Covering and protecting his chest is the breastplate; protecting his upper legs are the cuisse; protecting lower legs are the greaves; and protecting his feet are the sabatons. In his left hand is a shield; in his right hand is a sword, the only offensive weapon as part of this suit of armor. The entire suit of armor is called the panoply.

Armour was used for battle and as Paul writes in verse 12 & 13 *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”*

Paul in the epistle sets out seven pieces of armour for our spiritual protection and that we are to put the whole armour on for no warrior would go into battle with only half his armour in place.

First, put on the belt of truth wide, so protective. Truth in all relationships, truth about God and truth about our spouse, our children, our parents, our grandparents, our neighbors. Finally grasping the truth about ourselves, to live truthfully and not to live a lie.

Then, put on breastplate of righteousness. This means to be in right and Healthy relationships, good relationships with all those around you and even yourself. To be in right relationships and not in wrong, sick and demeaning relationships.

Then put on foot wear of the gospel of peace. Not to be looking for a fight with yourself, your family member, your co-worker but trying to work through the legitimate conflicts that are always found between people inside and outside of churches and with nations. Part of the armour is for us to be peacemakers, to work hard for peace and towards peace in all relationships.

Then, put on the helmet of salvation. What a gift it is to know that you are saved, that there is nothing you can do to earn or merit your own salvation, but that salvation and eternal life are a gift from God through his grace. I don't have to worry about being saved. I don't have to question whether or not I deserve eternal life. Eternal life is a given because I accept Jesus. I don't have to worry about it and the same is with all who accept Jesus as Lord.

Then we are to put on the shield of faith, in other words to trust God fully and to trust that God is with you, to trust that God is in you, to trust that God will strengthen you for every situation that you are facing. You can't prove it. You can't prove God and you can't prove God's inner strength and you can't prove eternal life. But you have been given the gift of trust. Trusting your inner spiritual self; trusting God's slow plan to health and wholeness. You can't see it, but you can trust God's future plan for your life on both sides of the grave and that's being in the kingdom.

Put on the sword of the Spirit that is the Word of God. There is power in the Bible, in the Word of God. The words of Jesus, the Apostle Paul and the Old Testament are not merely words printed on pages of a dusty book that we pull out when the preacher is coming or when we have an occasional Bible devotional. God's words are living words, intended to live in us. We learn them, memorize them, and recite them spiritually in our brains, so that God's words are constantly inside us. What a resource.

And finally put on praying in the Spirit. There is not piece of armor mentioned with this seventh quality, but the quality is important. Last but not least is "praying in the Spirit," in the mood, in the emotion, in the remembrance. Do you have a problem with prayer and wandering minds? Do you have a problem praying the Lord's Prayer and staying focused? Our Father, who are in heaven....about that bill, that assignment, that game on TV today...and away our minds wander. Not praying in the Spirit at all, but distracted by every thought and whim that enters our mind simultaneously with our prayers.

One thing with armour is that it has weak points, points of vulnerability and our enemy, Satan, knows this and he will use them to his advantage by tempting us through them. A suit of armour normally had a weak point under the arms and at the joints so to our armour can have weaknesses; these are our phobias, our anger, our un-forgiveness and our undelt with sins.

When I was in the Armoured Corp I served in Centurion Tanks. The Armour on these machines was quite thick, up to 13 inches in some spots. However the underbelly was quite thin and so it was our weak spot, one which we were careful not to expose to the enemy. So it is with our personal weaknesses, we all have them and we need to be aware of them so that we keep them out of the enemy's eyes.

People we are in a spiritual battle each day we walk this earth and all believers can find themselves to Satan's attacks because we are on the side of Jesus and his way, the way of truth, peace and justice. Consequently, Paul tells us to have every piece of God's armour in place to resist Satan's attacks when they come and be able to stand firm in the midst of these attacks which come in the form of sickness, insults, setbacks, temptations which are aimed at our weaknesses. For under such circumstances it is easy to become discouraged and if the attacks are sustained fall away. With our armour in place and our shield held high and in place we will be protected from Satan's flaming arrows.

As the time for Back to Church and JAAL approach we as a church collectively and individually need to keep our armour in place and in good order, for Satan will try to upset the applecart and render our efforts ineffective.

So how do we put on this armour and keep it in good order so that our weaknesses do not show? By spending time in the word, and our focus on our relationship with God through Christ.

In our Gospel some who were with Jesus were drifting away for they found Jesus words all too hard to handle, yet Peter states "where else would we go for you have the words of eternal life. So it is to the words of Jesus that came down from heaven that we go for in them and our acceptance of them is our protection and our promise to eternal life.

This does not mean we will have an easy ride for if we are in oneness with Jesus we can expect to share in his struggles as well as his peace.

For as Paul writes in Romans 8:37-39. *"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,*

nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

This means that this wonderful truth has become a reality to all who believe and follow Jesus. For when you put on his armour, his life surrounds you and keeps you safe, keeps you close to him, and gives you freedom to be his precious friend and trusted companion.

So today “put on Christ, eat of the bread that was sent down from heaven and put your faith in the words that bring eternal life so that you can stand firm with your armour of faith in place and be the person God in Christ Jesus wants you to be, for in him is your victory.

In the name of Father Son & Holy Spirit.

Mike Perrott