

Sunday 15 October 2006 Sermon - King's Centre Christian Church, Sheffield, UK

COVENANT SERIES – Week 4, The Armour of God Part 1

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Introduction

We are spending 2 sermons looking at the armour of God. It may be a familiar topic for many, but I hope it comes with a fresh *covenant* perspective. I'm preparing the ground this sermon, next time Marjorie will be covering each armour item in detail.

Today we're going to look at what that mystical phrase 'clothe yourselves in Christ' (Rom 13:14) means for us in reality, in our everyday situations. And we're going to look at another Old Testament covenant story – David & Jonathan – to learn from a couple of guys who really *got* covenant.

Reminder of Covenant

Nick gave a reminder of the previous 3 sermons on Covenant. Get the CDs/MP3s or transcripts if you missed them from www.kingscentreonline.com

Our spiritual dimension to life

I recognise at the outset that for some of us, a sermon on spiritual armour might be old hat, you've heard several of them over the years while you've been in churches. For others, this might be totally new ground as you begin your journey of being a follower of Jesus, and learning how to take on the right and best models that God gives us to live full and meaningful lives serving him. But I'm not trying to give trite or easy answers.

In once sense, the Christian walk is simple – we are called to love God with everything, love our neighbours too, and along the way, our covenant partner promises that if we love him, he'll provide the protection and provision which we need. The part that is sometimes harder for us to understand is that **there are ways and means by which this comes about.**

The bible is very clear that as Christians, as followers of Christ and covenant brothers of Christ in this world, **we are engaged continually in battle.** We are in a battle. **Being a Christian does not mean a quiet life!**

In Ephesians chapter 6 the apostle Paul makes this clear (v10-12). "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. **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."

We are engaged in a cosmic battle! It may sound like a sci-fi film - but actually, sci-fi takes some of its bearings and inspiration from the truth laid out in the bible, not the other way around. **You are an eternal being now. You've got a spiritual dimension.** I wonder, do you realise this? Do you realise that as soon as you become a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, your spirit will no longer die? Your Eternal life, which is your spiritual live, starts....now.

There is a great deal more happening in the spiritual realm that you or I are ever aware of. And as mature Christians, we need to understand this fact and live our lives in such a way that we are not in danger of getting picked-off by the spiritually evil, malevolent forces which are out to get us.

Here's how it can happen:

- Covenant is like an umbrella
- When people stand outside of the protection and provision of the covenant (away from the umbrella – they get wet) – your enemy is better able to pick you off, to 'devour you' (as the apostle Paul puts it)
- **The devil brings sinfulness, sadness, sickness, suffering, satanic oppression**
 - **Always his weapons of war, tools of his trade**

Examples from everyday life might be:

- You realise you are anxious, and you have no peace in your everyday life
- You find you are at odds with most other people – inwardly seething at them, resenting others, cross with them
- You have a persistent sickness which is troubling you

If we've stepped out of the covenant protection and provision, The aim for us all is to get back under the umbrella.

- To say sorry for when we sin and walk away from God
- To live with faith in Jesus in the way the bible lays out for us

Another thing we learnt about our covenant relationship is that as partners with God, we not only inherit his friends, we inherit his enemies (and he inherits ours). This is the reality of our lives – we live spiritually as well as physically, we are in spiritual relationship with the almighty creator of heaven and earth – and his *spirit (Holy Spirit)* is within us! And we face spiritual forces ranged up against humans (both Christians and non-Christians).

The difference for us, is that we can stand against them! I want us to understand this as a church!

Standing

The summary of what Paul says in Eph 6 is this: "Therefore put on the full armour 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."

- He goes on to list the individual items of armour, belt, sword etc – see the next sermon

And the reason we can stand against the spiritual onslaught which comes at us every day, is that **we don't have to stand by ourselves**. We've got a much bigger covenant partner to lean on. And we get to play with HIS weapons and armour in the fight..... not our own. If we do it right.

Tag-team wrestling example - The fight is a bit like a tag-wrestling match. One member of the 2-person team can be getting beaten up and trapped in the corner, so they need to *tag* their fresh, fit partner as soon as possible. When you find yourselves in a spiritual battle – don't fight on your own, tag your covenant partner into the ring as soon as possible!

Before we move on, let's remind ourselves of the right order of things.

Whose armour is it? GOD's.

Not ours. Not our strength, not our will, not our struggling faith, not our knowledge or prowess. God's armour.

David and Jonathan - 1 Sam 18

Let's look at a story from the Old Testament of 2 young men who understood what it meant to share armour and switch identities. It will give us insight into what its like for us to share God's armour.

Background

David a young man is anointed by Samuel – the last of the judges of Israel – to be the next King of Israel, after Saul dies. He spends some time in the service of the king (who is unaware of what David will become) and because David really understood covenant, when the time comes for the Israelites to face up to the feared Philistine warrior Goliath, it is David who understands that with God on their side they have nothing to fear from this tribe, and even the 9 feet tall bloke! So he kills him, because being tall simply made him a bigger target for the people of God to take down! Afterwards, over time Saul becomes jealous of the military successes of David, and his popularity amongst the people, and eventually as God lifts his anointing and his spirit from Saul, and puts it instead onto his chosen successor David, Saul begins a campaign to kill David.

Jonathan makes a covenant with David

That's a bit of the background. Just after the success over Goliath, Saul's eldest son Jonathan makes a covenant with David. 1 Sam 18:1-4 "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt."

Jonathan obviously knew David well and loved him as one of his own family, and they really identify with each other. God had already made Jonathan love David – so they *ratified* it by making a covenant. **Jonathan (the stronger party) made a covenant with David**

- Deep friendship – not homosexual. No mention in the text
- David is a man who Jonathan can be in partnership with – Stand with him as a friend
- To symbolise the covenant Jonathan gave David his robe, belt, bow, sword etc
- **Just like our covenant relationship with Jesus – there is a swapping of identities, and a sharing of resources.**
 - Jonathan the stronger party in this case (as the heir to the throne) gives to David *his armour* – his symbols of strength, protection, provision, power, and indeed peace

They swap clothes to symbolize

Jonathan as first born son of king would have worn a 'long sleeved coat' (previously translated as 'coat of many colours') because the eldest didn't do the manual work of others. So when you see David wearing Jonathans' cloak or armour, belt, bow, no doubt a shiny and expensive sword, you don't know who he is! If you see him in the distance, you wonder...Is it Jonathan or David? You have to be careful to treat him well. Because it might be David, this lowly shepherd boy from out in the sticks, or it might be Jonathan, the heir to the kingdom! And if you are in battle, you don't see just a lowly shepherd boy with a sling and a few stones – which was **David's old identity**. Now you see the royal armour, the crest, the sword. David has taken on this new identity, because now he is in covenant with the heir to the throne

Armour of God

It's the same picture when Romans 13 tells us to **clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ** (Rom 13:14). **We need to remember that we've got a whole new wardrobe now! We wear Christ's armour.** If you ever think it's yours, you will get into problems with spiritual warfare.

- Rom 13:12-14 – put on the armour of light & behave well. Clothe yourselves with Jesus is the message.

Don't go into battle as you, in your strength and just your character – *TAG* as soon as possible and send Jesus Christ into the battle!

Apostle Paul speaks of 'putting on' and 'putting off' a lot (also in Ephesians). **That's covenant language. You can put on this stuff, because it's now available to you through your covenant partner.**

You aren't righteous yourself, but because your covenant partner IS – you can take it to yourself, as your own.

- God's gift is righteousness through faith (Rom 3:22-24)
- You don't have an armour of light – but God is surrounded by unapproachable light

Eph 6 is all about what our strategy should be when we are confronted with the powers of darkness. Put on your stronger covenant partner's armour. **The armour isn't yours! It's God's.**

Don't try and win the battles on your own, in your own strength. YOU CAN'T DO THAT – STOP TRYING.

- "The heart is deceitful above all things" (Jeremiah 17:9)
 - There isn't enough truth in you to hold your trousers up!
 - **That's why we need the belt of God's truth**

Don't try and rely on something in us - because it's not in us. If we could already do it, we wouldn't need to be saved or changed by Jesus.

We can't stand by ourselves! And the great news is – we don't have to!

The message of Ephesians 6 is that we can stand against the spiritual warfare going on around us – because we stand in the strength God gives, with the armour he provides. So when we 'stand' we don't have to live in fear, even of our past/recent sins – we live in a situation of forgiveness and being cleansed by God (if we in constant repentance)

- We say 'Lord, let me wear your armour'
- **And when the devil confronts us – he sees Jesus**
 - Just like those Israelites in the marketplace wouldn't have been sure who they were looking at from behind – was it David or Jonathan?
- **The Devil looks for a fight, but he sees Jesus in us!**
 - If we are wearing the armour of our covenant partner. if we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 13:14). If we are living under the covenant boundaries of his protection and provision, if we are standing under the umbrella
- **And when the devil sees Jesus he QUAKES**

When I pray for people, I don't tell them to get healed 'in the name of Nick'! The first thing I do is tell the enemy that I'm acting solely in the name of Jesus! Because "at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

- We say
 - ‘Lord, I don’t have a righteousness of my own – would you cover me with your righteousness?’
 - ‘I can’t save myself – send the protection of your salvation to me’
 - ‘I don’t have confidence, but you do – send yours to be me protection and confidence.....’
 - ‘I don’t have much peace – but I present my anxiousness to you, knowing that the peace of God will be mine in return’
 - ‘Lord, I’m tired of this world’s search and rejection of truth, - your truth is greater than mine – let me know and live your truth’
 - ‘Lord, I’m struggling with temptation in a certain area.... Give me more you’re your holy spirit to help me, and other people around me to lift up the shield of faith with me’

Isn’t it a lot more secure than trying to polish up your own armour? We’d just get beaten up during the day!

Response

Who knows what lies ahead of us? At stages in life, **we will all face hardship and trials, sickness and sadness in life. We want to become a people who can stay standing when this happens,** because we aren’t trying to prop ourselves up in our own strength, we are leaning on the truth and the promises of God.

If you want to know and experience God’s presence, power, peace in your life daily, even in the middle of a war zone..... come to him humbly and continually, and ask him to wrap himself and his character of truth, peace, holiness, hope, saving grace around you like a cloak.

If you don’t feel strong enough to stand this morning – get people around you – to support you and pray with you, to bring you into God’s presence, and to hold up with you that shield of faith.

If you need to know the protection and provision of our almighty God in the struggles of life, then don’t try to fight your own battles, and take your own decisions. Do what we are told to do in 1 Peter 5:6

- Humble yourself and get under God’s hand
 - Live under the covenant– a life of love and simple obedience
 - Don’t rush in – get God’s perspective on things first
- that God may life you up in due time
- and then the devil will flee from you