

WAR - THE HELMET OF SALVATION

During the Vietnam war many POW's survived the horrors of captivity because they developed a mental shield of truth to combat the enemies lies. Daily the enemy would pump propaganda into their cells telling the soldiers the U. S. government was corrupt and had abandoned them, their friends and family had forgotten about them or considered them dead, and their wives had divorced them – all ploys to cause these men to crack and give up vital information. Many of these men developed ways to shield themselves from the lies. One was a pianist who wrote who played concerts in his mind. One was an architect who designed hundreds of buildings. One was a golfer who replayed every hole he had ever played. These men blocked the lies of the enemy with their mental Helmet of truth – they ceased fighting a physical battle, but never stopped fighting the battle of the mind and spirit. We must do the same in our spiritual battle with Satan.

Today we are continuing in our series looking at the Armor of God and we come to the fifth piece of armor that is mentioned;

Eph 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation...

A parallel passage to Ephesians 6 is found in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians;

1 Thessalonians 5:8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

Notice that in Thessalonians Paul adds the word HOPE. What is hope? Webster's defines hope as "to cherish a desire with anticipation." For the Christian, hope is more than just wishful thinking. It is a confident assurance grounded in God's word.

Helmets are a part of the world we live in. When I was a kid we used to ride our bikes all over town without ever thinking that maybe a helmet would be a good thing to wear. Now they are mandatory.

In the USA there are about 275,000 non-fatal bicycle injuries every year involving kids. That's about 690 kids a day. In addition there about average 38,000 roller blade injuries and about 61,000 skateboarding injuries per year. Many of these include head injuries. That's a lot. It has been estimated that bicycle helmets could have prevented 75 percent of fatal head injuries and 85 percent of non-fatal traumatic brain injuries in kids injured while riding their bikes. That's a pretty big impact. By a parent insisting their child wear a helmet while riding their bike, roller blades or skateboards it is estimated that they could prevent 150 deaths, 40,000 traumatic brain injuries and up to 50,000 scalp and face injuries per year. The point is that accidents happen, but the simple act of wearing a helmet can drastically lessen the likelihood of serious injury.

Because of the amount of head injuries in sports, helmets are also mandatory. If you want to go over and look inside our new building you need to be wearing a hard hat. Why? Because the head is something that needs to be protected. Head injuries are common. In Roman days, some helmets were made of thick leather with metal plates and others were made of molded metal. Whatever the design, the purpose of the helmet is obvious – to protect the head from injury.

Last week we spoke about the fact that the devil's attacks are often centered around deception and altering the truth. It is an attack against the mind.

One of the primary ways the devil attacks is by getting us to doubt the validity of our faith. In the garden of Eden, the serpent came to Eve questioning “did God really say?” He wanted Eve to doubt what God had said to her. The devil does the same thing today. He tries to get us to question the hope of our salvation by getting us to question God’s word.

Have you ever watched an 8 year old put on a football helmet? They become fearless because they feel invincible. They start ramming into things and banging their heads into stuff. Our salvation equips us with a calm assurance that no matter what we go through in life, that God is in control. The certainty of our salvation gives us confidence to face anything in life. We know that no matter what happens we have the victory in Christ.

The devil counters this by throwing hardships and pain into our lives. He knows that if he can inflict enough pain that we may begin to question God’s love and God’s plan for our life. Think about it, when was the last time you had a really bad day? The bible says in Nehemiah 8:10 that “the joy of the LORD is our strength.” The devil knows that if he can rob us of our joy that we become easy targets for manipulation.

The Apostle Paul went through many seasons of pain in his life. He was able to maintain his joy through it all.

Phil 1:12 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. 13 As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. 15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, 19 for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. 20 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. 22 If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, 26 so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

Gratitude is a vaccine, an antitoxin, and an antiseptic. Like a vaccine it can prevent the invasion of a disgruntled, discouraged spirit. Like an antitoxin, gratitude can prevent the affects of the poisons of cynicism, criticalness, and grumbling. Like an antiseptic, a spirit of gratitude can soothe and heal the most troubled spirit. -- John Henry Jowett

1. Overcoming Persecution - (vs. 12-14) within the world

The first obstacle to joy Paul’s joy was the fact that he was in prison and being persecution. Picture Paul sitting in prison writing these words. He had been a prisoner now for more than 3 years in Caesarea first under Felix and then under Festus.

He had been ship wrecked and faced death in Malta. Now he is in chains in a Roman prison. If anyone had reason to be discouraged and give up it was Paul. Even though he had been through so much and was in such a difficult place he was still able to rejoice and gave thanks. He gives thanks that the palace guards were being reached and that the church was being strengthened with boldness. Even in a very bad situation, there was still good coming out of it. In the midst of it all he found something to be thankful for.

Matthew Henry, the famous Bible scholar, was once accosted by thieves and robbed of his purse. He wrote these words in his diary: "Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before. Second, although they took my purse, they did not take my life. Third, because, although they took my all, it was not much. Fourth, because it was I who was robbed, and not someone else."

About 50 million, or more than two-thirds of all Christian martyrs in the history of the church, actually died in the twentieth century. On March 15 there was a shooting at a Mosque in New Zealand where 50 people died. You probably all have heard about it, it has been all over the news for weeks. What you have probably not heard of is the fact that hundreds of Christians have been killed in Nigeria in the last few weeks. There has been nothing in the press about it. The organization Open Doors published a list of over 4000 names of people murdered for their faith in 2018. Of course there are thousands more nameless victims that could be added to that list.

So what do you do when you face hardships? What do you do when you face persecution from the world? You look for the good. You remember in all things to give thanks. Giving thanks is the best way to recapture joy.

We know that the church in Canada is coming under increasing pressure. Times are changing and it is easy to become angry and bitter about what we see happening in our own nation. In the midst of it all, we rejoice that we still have the freedom to meet as a church. We thank God for the foundation of faith this nation has enjoyed and the fact that there are still many Christians and bible believing churches in this land. We need to continue to pray for our nation and be agents of change, but through it all we need to give thanks.

2. Overcoming Betrayal - (vs. 15-19) within the church

The second obstacle to joy which Paul faced was not from the world outside but from the church within. While Paul was stuck in prison, others were using it as an opportunity to move in and deceive the churches he had started by slandering his name and questioning his motives.

While Paul could have been bitter and lashed out at these people, he focused on what was truly important. The Gospel was being preached and people were still being saved and set free. In the midst of problems he was still giving thanks. Yes some may have wrong motives but at least Christ is proclaimed.

Back in 1990 during the Gulf War, US Troops took on the Iraqi forces out in the deserts of Kuwait. In just two months the US won an amazing victory and had relatively few casualties. One of the interesting things about that war was the fact that the majority of the troops injured or killed were not because of the enemy but because of "friendly fire." That means they were injured or killed by their own troops.

A few years before, during the 1982 war in the Falkland Islands between England and Argentina, the Royal Navy's destroyer HMS Sheffield was sunk by a single missile fired from an Argentine fighter jet. This caused some people to wonder if modern surface warships were obsolete. But a later check revealed that the Sheffield's defenses did pick up the incoming missile. Although the ship's computer correctly identified the missile as an "Exocet" it was programmed to treat Exocet missiles as "friendly fire." It saw the missile coming, but ignored it because it thought it meant no harm.

We see this in the church all the time. People come to church and they let their guard down because they feel safe within the walls. They label everyone around them as 'no danger.' Unfortunately, we all know that within the church there are those who come as wolves in sheep's clothing. The church is not a country club for the healthy but a hospital for the sick. Therefore it should not come as a surprise that Christians can often act in very unchristian ways.

When we first moved to Kuwait I would work with the youth and they loved to play Volleyball. There was one problem. Every time we played I would have this one person on my team, and it seemed that every time they served they would hit the ball right into the back of my head. They would always apologize and say it was a mistake, but after a while I just would not trust them. I would have to leave the court when they served.

Ever felt like that in the church. Someone who claims to be on the same side as you, and every time they serve you keep getting hit? Attacks from within the body hurt the most because they are unexpected and close to the heart. Close friends can hurt you the most! Often we fight about so many things in the church that we forget we are all on the same side and have the same task.

Again, when we first moved to Kuwait the girls wanted a pet so we bought them a little fish tank with some fish. They used to love sitting there and watching the fish swim around. They gave them all names. After a while, one of the fish disappeared, and then another one. The fish were all disappearing one after another, while one of them seemed to be getting fatter and fatter. I am sure you see where this is going. The one fish was eating all the others. Likewise, as Christians we can live together in peace or eat each other. Whatever we do – the world around us is watching!

3. Overcoming Fear - (vs. 20-26) within yourself

The third obstacle to joy that Paul faced was the realization that his life could, at any time, be taken from him. Fear can immobilize us and rob us of our joy. Fear of death, fear of failure or fear of commitment can all keep us from being who God has called us to be.

Once again, the important thing here to Paul was the Gospel. If he continued to live, he would continue to give his life in service. If he dies - even better! He gets to go home and be with God in glory. In was a win win situation. Whether in life or in death Paul would be faithful to the calling that he had received. Likewise all of us need to come to this same realization. We can be thankful even in death because we know that it is not the end but only the beginning.

If life is to have meaning, and if God's will is to be done, all of us have to accept who we are and what we are, give it back to God, and thank Him for the way He made us. What I am is God's gift to me; what I do with it is my gift to Him.

If anyone would tell you the shortest, surest way to happiness and all perfection, he must tell you to make it a rule to yourself to thank and praise God for everything that happens to you. For it is certain that whatever seeming calamity happens to you, if you thank and praise God for it, you turn it into a blessing. -- William Law

Fear often holds us back from doing what God has created us to do. At the time it was completed in 1937, the Golden Gate Bridge was the longest suspension bridge in the world. During the first phase of the project, 23 men fell to their death. There were very few safety devices, and things seemed to be going from bad to worse. So when it was halfway completed they decided to take another look and to make some changes. Here is what they did. They reorganized and they built the largest net ever made and attached it under the area where the men were working. Was it worth the cost and the time it took to do that? Well just ask the 10 men who fell into the net! Not only did it save the lives of those 10 men, the work was actually done sooner than planned because they no longer lived in fear of falling.

Henry Fairlie of the Washington Post wrote that the "fear of risk is killing the American Spirit." He points out how our present society is so fearful of everything that we have lost the pioneering daring our forefathers had. Would anyone today risk crossing the ocean in an un-seaworthy ship like the Mayflower? While we were down in Chile in Puntas Arenas we had a chance to visit a museum and see a replica of Magellan's ship that first travelled through that area as it travelled around the world. It is mind boggling that they were able to do it in such a small vessel. How about the pioneers that crossed the Rockies in their wagon trains?

There is a lesson here for the church of our Lord. Many good works go wanting for fear of the risk involved. Some Christians will not become soul winners because of the risk of being hurt or being called insensitive. Others have never given much money to God because of fear of poverty. Leaders refuse to make decisions for fear that what they are suggesting might not succeed. So often the "fear of risk" has killed many good programs in the church.

A man was telling his friend about some hunting dogs he had. They were good hunting dogs that he used when he went to hunt pigs and other large game in the mountains. Those dogs were fearless. He shared however, that the dogs, as tough as they were, were deathly afraid of chickens. The friend couldn't believe it, so he asked him why. When the dogs were puppies, they lived around the chickens. The chickens at the time, were much larger than the little puppies. As a result the chickens would bully the puppies and chase them all over the place. The young puppies learned to fear the chickens. Because of that, as strong hunting dogs, they still clung to their fear of chickens!

Satan may have had power over us before. He may have taught us to be afraid of him for many years. When we have Jesus in our lives, we have authority over Satan. Still because we have learned for so long that we are powerless against Satan, we often tend to still believe that. Like those dogs, we often fear what we need not fear.

Maybe there was a time in your life when the idea of death would have scared you, but not anymore. Death was conquered by Jesus on the cross 2000 years ago. Like Paul we affirm that to live is Christ and to die is gain. Whether we live or die, our focus is Jesus.

Maybe you are here today and you have been struggling in one of these areas of your faith. Our new construction project is a hard hat area. Likewise, life is a hard hat area. You need to get your helmet on. Maybe the fear is from the outside, maybe it is from the inside or maybe it is from within you. In all things, remember to give thanks. Remember to hope.

Psalms 33:20-21 We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. 21 In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name.

My prayer for all of us this morning is the prayer of Paul for the church in Rome;

Romans 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May the hope of our salvation so fill us that we overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit out into the world around us.