

Sermon 3:

And having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”

Shoes of Gospel of Peace

Paul is using the image of a Roman soldier, whose sturdy sandals gave him stability and protection in battle. Which is ironic given that the equipment we are discussing is the gospel of peace. We must remember that the world is deathly opposed to God, which means peace with the world is enmity with God, and vice versa. These shoes bring readiness to fight Satan, they bring blessing both from others, and from God.

This verse is somewhat difficult to translate. It is vague whether the word preparation is referring to the preparation or firmness provided by the gospel of peace, or if the preparation is a believer's preparation or readiness to share the gospel of peace.

I think this second option is most likely. So if we phrase it closer to this interpretation, “Having put on the equipment of the gospel of peace, or having put on the readiness to share the gospel of peace.”

What does it look like to be prepared to share the gospel?

How do we put on preparation? Paul tells us to conduct ourselves with wisdom towards outsiders, making the most of the opportunity to share with them. (Col 4) He then encourages us to do something which would seem to be an obvious first step in preparing ourselves to share

the gospel. But we often skip this first step. At least I know I often do. Paul encourages us to pray for the chance to speak forth the mystery of Christ. Isn't this beautiful? Have you ever prayed for the chance to give testimony to a friend or family member who wasn't a Christian, or perhaps a straying sheep? Not only does it acknowledge that faith is a gift from God, and unbelievers cannot understand if the Holy Spirit doesn't work in their hearts, but it also reminds us that God is the one who gives us first the desire, and then ability to serve Him.

Asking for the opportunity to share our faith helps us reframe the situation. God doesn't need us. If we were silent the very rocks would cry out. Instead, we ask God for the chance to proclaim His word. Remember how Isaiah's ministry began? Isaiah asked God for the opportunity to be his messenger saying, "Here I am. Send me!" Isaiah's prophetic ministry began when he asked God for permission to speak on His behalf. It's an honor to be a messenger for the master! Especially when the news we get to share is the news of God's peace! We get to invite people off the streets to the marriage feast. We get to offer unemployed loafers the opportunity for good work and a day's wages. We should be praying like Isaiah, "Here I am. Send me!" Pray for the chance to share this news with unbelievers. Pray for strength and wisdom in sharing the word, pray for the spirit to work in their heart, convicting of sin and judgement and righteousness. We need to be ready at all times to share our hope. Pray for opportunities, look for

chances.

But most of the time, instead of asking God for the chance to proclaim his word, we are like Jonah, or Moses, asking to be dismissed from duty. We ask God to send our brother instead. “Our brother Aaron speak good, but we don’t speak good.” We have all our reasons lined up like Moses. We have a speech impediment, we aren’t educated enough, we’re not an extrovert, we don’t know any non-Christians. (This one is my bad excuse) Then listen to God’s response to Moses. “Who has made the human mouth? Or who makes anyone unable to speak, or deaf, or able to see or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?” Or Jesus’ promise to the disciples when He sends them out to preach, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Or God’s promise to Isaiah, “for the Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.” Or Jesus’ encouragement to the disciples, “Do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.” Or Jesus promise that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit came upon them, allowing them to be witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and the remotest part of the earth.” Or His promise that not a hair would fall from our head without His oversight. Is that enough? (with a smile) God will not abandon us in the sight of embarrassment, or broken relationships, or lost jobs, or persecution. He promises special protection for His messengers.

Another thing that can help us grow in boldness and desire to share the gospel is sympathy for those who are living in darkness. Develop a tender heart towards unbelievers. They are living in sin, and as a result they have no peace. Isaiah says there is no peace for the wicked. There is nowhere they can go with their guilt. There is no one they can confess sin to. There is no day in the week set apart for rest and worship. There is no God who will listen to their prayers. Can you imagine the constant restlessness this produces? I remember one time when Cynthia and I were not on good terms in our dating years, I felt sick to my stomach for days from the stress. Now imagine not being on good terms with your creator. Knowing the difference between good and evil, seeing the evil in your own heart, yet not knowing where to turn. Our heart is restless until it rests in God. So befriend the tax collectors and sinners. We are messengers proclaiming God's peace to those who repent and turn to Him. Do not be afraid of people's responses. They need the good news that God offers peace from sin, from guilt, from fear of death. This is good news! This is the gospel!

Let us ask the master for opportunities to shout the good news from the rooftop. You won't say all the right words, you won't have an answer for everything, you might even stumble over your words and look stupid, but that's ok. We don't pray to God that we look bad as we share the gospel, we pray that He would use our work to spread his kingdom.

So if we are to put on readiness to share the gospel, HOW DOES PREPARATION OR READINESS TO SHARE THE GOSPEL OF PEACE PREPARE US TO FIGHT THE DEVIL?

- 1- Often when we share the gospel, we get front row seats to the spirit's power to change people's lives. We have the opportunity to watch the spirit at work which fills us with new strength and faith. Have you ever seen somebody saved that you never thought would be? Or seen a family or friend's sin defeated through the power of the gospel of peace? Read through acts. It's a wonderful historical documentation of the gospel's power in the early church. The spirit conquers everything in its path, from a Christian murderer named Saul, to the lack of languages spoken by the apostles, to the divide between Jews and Gentiles, to the lies of Ananias and Saphira, to the bitter persecution of the saints. This is so clear in our own lives as well. Sharing the gospel forces us to rely on God. He is the one who even gives us the desire to serve Him, then he promises to give us the words to say and protect us from harm and finally, while we can plant and water, it is God who causes the growth. God does it all.

So as my college president said to us freshman, put your boots on! Put on the sandals of the Gospel of Peace! Be ready in season and out to share your hope. Be ready to take up your cross and follow Christ, no matter the price.

Shield of Faith

II Cor 10:4 says “For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.”

I John 5:4 says “For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world – our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

The shield Paul is envisioning is a tall, rectangular shield which could cover an entire Roman soldier. The wooden shield could be covered in fabric, hide, which protected it from flaming arrows. The shield was central to the Roman method of fighting. A well-disciplined regiment could fend off a Calvary charge by sticking in tight formation, with their lances held out beyond their shields. They could also approach well defended ramparts by placing shields above them and to the front, like a turtle shell; protecting them from arrows, and anything thrown off the walls.

This well-crafted piece of armor was the first and most important tool for defense against all sorts of attacks. Especially the danger from arrows. Armies are known to have dipped arrows in tar and lit them on fire, or dipped them in poison, creating a burning effect as the poison spread throughout the body. Therefore, these arrows needed to be stopped before getting close enough to burn or poison the soldier. This is the image Paul uses to describe the danger of Satan’s attacks, and the power of faith.

What kind of darts does Satan attack us with? What type of fire or poison does he tip his arrows with? One of Satan’s main methods of attack is accusation. In fact, one of Satan’s names is “The accuser”, or “accuser of the brethren.” Satan’s accusations are especially dangerous

because he mixes truth in with lies. He reminds us of the many ways we have in fact failed and magnifies our guilt, yet here he mixes deadly poison into the reality of our fallen nature. Rather than conviction of sin leading to the cross, Satan attempts to isolate us in our weakness and guilt. He singles us out, like sheep apart from the shepherd, driving us into despair, fear, and unredeemed guilt which drives us deeper into sin.

There is a powerful scene in the Pilgrim's Progress in which Bunyon puts this spiritual battle into the flesh, imagining the accusations flung at Christian by the dragon Apollyon. I'm going to read the scene, and I want you to notice how Christian uses faith to fight these accusations.

Apollyon says, "Thou hast already been unfaithful in thy service to the Prince, and how dost thou think to receive wages from him?"

Christian responds, "Wherein, O Apollyon have I been unfaithful to him?"

"Thou didst faint at first setting out, when thou wast almost choked in the Gulf of Despond; thou didst attempt wrong ways to be rid of thy burden, whereas thou didst sinfully sleep and lose thy choice thing; thou wast, also, almost persuaded to go back at the sight of the lions; and when thou talkest of thy journey, and of what thou hast heard and seen, thou art inwardly desirous of vain-glory in all that thou sayest or doest."

But listen to this response, Christian said, "All this is true, and much more which thou hast left out, but the Prince whom I serve and honor is merciful, and ready to forgive."

"And with that Apollyon threw a flaming dart at his breast; but Christian had a shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so

prevented the danger of that.”

Christian doesn't deny the accusations. He doesn't try to outsmart Apollyon. He holds up the shield of faith. Faith that his Prince forgives the sins of those who repent. Faith that the Prince will accept him into His kingdom. Faith that the Prince is who He claims to be, a good, righteous, merciful ruler.

Faith is powerful. Jesus said that faith the size of a mustard seed could move mountains.

Read the bible. It is littered with stories which demonstrate the power of faith. Elijah was a man like us, but he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Yet we have a tendency to read our bibles as if those who came before us lived more by sight than faith. These men saw God's mighty deeds and lived under His divinely established laws and ordained kings, listened to His prophets, and walked with Jesus. They saw these things, but now we have to walk more by faith than sight. We think, “If only I could watch Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead, or walk on water, or feed the 5,000, then I wouldn't struggle with doubts and fears anymore. If I had seen what God did to the

Egyptians, and how he parted the red sea, I could trust him to protect me from harm.” No, these men are just like us, or rather, we are just like them. Signs did not produce faith in the hearts of the pharisees, nor did the majestic power of the plagues and red-sea cause the Israelites to trust God.

Meanwhile many men's faith grew strong despite a lack of

outward signs. Believers have always walked by faith, not by sight.

Do you want proof? Hebrews 11 documents the faith-filled actions of many men and women in the OT. Trusting shows the faith, not sight, individuals' actions. Their faith was in essence, the exact same as our faith today. "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval." And then the writer of Hebrews gives example after example of men and women who walked by faith in God. Hoping in the promise for a better country, an eternal kingdom, a heavenly city. Then, just a few verses later lies a beautiful verse that we can so easily identify with. "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth." These heroes were threatened by real, tangible dangers. They struggled with depraved hearts just like we do today. They faced the accusations of Satan, fear, and uncertainty at every turn, but they lived by faith, rather than sight, choosing to obey God, and trust His word. Our fathers in the faith might well have responded to Satan's accusations with the same words as Christian, "All this is true, and much more which thou hast left out, but the Prince whom I serve and honor is merciful, and ready to forgive."

Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith. (Heb 12)