

Armor Up with the Shield of Faith July 5, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **Go** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Letter to the Ephesians:

This week, the scripture focus is found in the Letter to the Ephesians. This letter was written by Paul to the church and surrounding people of Ephesus sometime around 60 A.D. Paul wrote this letter from jail, and probably wrote the letter to the Colossians about this same time. Paul's ministry at Ephesus totaled about 3 years, so he was very knowledgeable about their needs and issues. Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor having a harbor that opened into the Cayster River. That river emptied into the Aegean Sea making accessible by ship very easy. Consequently, the city was an intersection of major trade routes, and a strong commercial center. It boasted a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana, or Artemis in Greek, which served the fertility religion of its time. Paul wrote to expand the horizons of his readers, so that they might understand better the dimensions of God's eternal purpose and grace in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2) and come to appreciate the high goals God has for the church.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Ephesians 6: 10-17 CEB ¹⁰ *Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and his powerful strength. ¹¹ Put on God's armor so that you can make a stand against the tricks of the devil. ¹² We aren't fighting against human enemies but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens. ¹³ Therefore, pick up the full armor of God so that you can stand your ground on the evil day and after you have done everything possible to still stand. ¹⁴ So stand with the belt of truth around your waist, justice as your breastplate, ¹⁵ and put shoes on your feet so that you are ready to spread the good news of peace. ¹⁶ Above all, carry the shield of faith so that you can*

*extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the **helmet of salvation** and the sword of the Spirit, which is God's word.*

Acts 16:19-34 NRSV ²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. ²⁷ When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." ²⁹ The jailer^[e] called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." ³² They spoke the word of the Lord^[f] to him and to all who were in his house. ³³ At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay.

Questions to ponder about the passages:

What jumps out at you from these passages?

What was the function of a helmet in Roman times? What would be the function of a "helmet of salvation?"

Why do you think the fellow prisoners were interested in the prayers and hymns of Paul and Silas?

Commentary:

Since the writing of this passage by the mind of Paul, a lot has changed in our knowledge and understanding about the universe and science. According to the advances of science, we know the mustard seed is not the smallest seed, as referred to in Matthew 17. At the time, maybe it was the smallest known seed. On the other hand, maybe it was more about the idea of faith, rather than science. The advances of science have helped us to understand our universe and the process of life much better, but it still does not explain the fullness of our spiritual dimension in which we live. Things happen that we cannot explain. Science cannot fully describe what faith is, but it can explain some visible positive results of faith; as well as, negative results of immature faith.

So, with that in mind, we explore the spiritual dimension found in Ephesians 6. You may not believe in a spiritual dimension that has evil, satan, demons, and the alike. Paul did! Jesus did! Many others do in our time! Maybe Paul is putting things in prospective for us. There is a cosmic battle between heaven and hell, good and evil, God and satan, and angels and demons. Don't be fooled, God and satan are not equals. There is no dualism here. Scripture clearly reveals that God is the ruler and most powerful, and that Jesus had power over the demons. In the end of this cosmic battle, God wins! Love wins! Faith wins! This focal passage helps us to realize that the true enemy is not the person you are having difficulty with, it is the powers of evil that works behind the scenes. Evil is allows seeking to destroy

and damage. God's main desire in our lives is to redeem us and build us up in faith. As we interact with God and one another, remember Jesus words that said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27).'" Jesus also said to his disciples as he sent them out, "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew 10:16)." Why did he say that, because they were going to encounter the same things Jesus did: demons, systemic abuse and sin, evil activities, and death. So, as you interact with God and others, be wise to the forces at work against you that seek to bring you down and hinder the movement of God's saving work. Be gentle with people, but wise to the spiritual forces that seek to destroy.

Four weeks ago: The first thing that you need to take up is the belt of truth and the breastplate of righteousness. The overall picture of the armor was from the Roman military. Paul was using the Roman armor, which people were used to seeing, and using it to describe what the Christian should use for armor in the spiritual battle. The belt, of truth, that went around the waist, held everything together that was used for battle. For the Christian, the truth of God, Jesus' words, and life experience give perspective on what life is like and how we should live it in the name of Christ Jesus. The breastplate, of righteousness, is what protects you from the perils of life's battles. By living a life of righteousness in the ways of God, not self-righteousness, the Christian can stay strong in the face of life's battles, and not be dragged down into destructive behavior. These are two elements that God has given us to be fortified on the pilgrimage of life.

Three weeks ago: We look deeper into the breastplate of righteousness through the story of David and Goliath. The Greek word for righteousness can also be translated into justice and just. The simple meaning of this word is "doing what is right" in the name of God. David was a young person, maybe 14 or 15 years old and was known as a sheep herder. When King Saul looked at how small and young David was, he probably laughed in disbelief at what could be done by David. Goliath was a nine-foot giant of a man. How could David beat Goliath? King Saul probably thought, "well, I have no one else who wants to fight the giant, so send him in since we will be defeated anyway." Funny how Saul put his armor on David. It probably was too big on him and encumbered his ability to move freely. David did have some strength about him to be able to tell the Saul that he had killed lions and bears with his stone and slingshot, while wearing his regular garments. David could not go into battle with Saul's over-sized armor on, so he didn't. God had developed David with certain gifts and abilities, different than King Saul. David could not proceed like Saul, David had to go into battle as he was and with his own abilities. Much like how we cannot face life's challenges with trying to use someone else's armor, or mimic their abilities. God has designed us with sacred

worth and abilities that are specific to just us. Do and be what you are designed to do and be.

Going into battle was different in this story. Sometimes a battle would happen in a valley where the opposing sides would be positioned opposite of one another on the hillsides. One person from each side would step up and out to do man-to-man combat in the middle of the valley. The person who lived claimed the victory for his side. In this particular battle in 1 Samuel 17, the Israelites, which were the army of God, and the Philistines were to battle. The Philistines chose a warrior that was nine feet tall, trash talked well, and carried his battle armor forcefully. When the Israelite army saw the Philistine warrior, fear gripped them. No one wanted to battle him. Then David came with his small frame and leather slingshot with rock in his pouch, to the rescue. One small rock placed in the right spot in the forehead of the giant dropped him to the ground. David won! And so, did the Israelite army. Besides the rock, David had the confidence that God was with him and that he was doing the right thing. David charged while shouting the name of God for the victory. The Philistines were not going to win and take over the land reserved for the Israelites. So, righteousness and justice are simply “doing what is right” on behalf of God. Even Ephesians 2 says that God designed us to do good works. God designed us to live into a Godly righteousness that promotes justice in all activities and brings about what is right. One other lesson, God’s power in us can bring down any giant that seeks to overtake us. We all have challenges that seem like giants before us. Be like David, have confidence that God will give you strength and wisdom to triumph over the giants. When you knock them down, you stand taller than they do.

Two weeks ago, we focused on the Gospel of Peace. The Gospel of peace refers to the peace that we find in reconciliation with God through Christ Jesus. We find the illustration of reconciliation in Romans 5:1-11. We also referred to Romans 5:1-2 during the May 10th Learning Group Study. Simply said, peace comes to us through our relationship with God through the death and resurrection of Christ who died forgiving our sin. It is sin that separates us from the love of God, while the activity of Christ, connects us to the love of God. When we connect with the love of God and sin is forgiven by Christ, we live in peace and harmony with God. It is that peace, that we are to embody and take out to the world. Through word and deed, we share the peace of God and try to live at peace with one another. As Christians, we find peace in God, and then take that peace to the world for others to experience. Colossians 3:12-17 helps us understand the behaviors and spiritual activities we need to practice in order to be examples externally of the peace in God we experience internally. Going back to the Ephesians passage, you are to have the shoes of readiness to go out with the Gospel of peace. Much like the Roman guard, who was always in armor and ready to go with shoes that could endure the journey, we, as Christians, through the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, are to be always ready to deliver the peace of God we experience.

Last Week, the Shield of Faith. In the CEB translation, Ephesians 6:16 opens with this prioritizing statement, “above all” signifying the importance of the “shield of faith.” According to the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, this shield (Greek - *thyreos*) was not a small round shield, but “a full-length leather-covered wood that protected the whole body. Burning arrows have been used in attacks on besieged cities since Assyrian times. A soldier who became terrified by flaming arrows caught in his shield might throw it down and become vulnerable to enemy spears. For this audience, these familiar images must also be linked to the use of “shield” for God (Gen 15:1).” (Vol XI, p. 461). This exhortation to carry the shield is a reminder to constantly trust in God. Perhaps this trust is what Jesus had in mind in Matthew 14:31 when he chided Peter for his “little faith.”

This week, the Helmet of Salvation. The Roman helmet protected the head, brain and mind from lethal blows. Paul calls it a helmet of salvation in that the believer’s experience of God’s saving love is protective in an onslaught of doubt or adversity. This is especially reflected in the VBS story paired with the “helmet of salvation.” In Acts 16, Paul and Silas ministry in Philippi was opposed by a mob that was stirred up by antagonists. As an attempt to restore order, they had the two leaders beaten and imprisoned. Paul and Silas could have given in to despair but instead they sing hymns and songs of salvation. This experience of worship not only protected them mentally and spiritually from despair, but it also evoked a miraculous, groundbreaking God-moment of liberation.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

In these passages, what is the main practical lesson you get from it?

What does the “helmet of salvation” protect believers from?

How did singing to God inspire and free Paul and Silas?

Has there been a song(s) that inspired and freed you mentally or spiritually in a time of adversity?

Activity of for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week: Ephesians 6:17
*“Take the **helmet of salvation** and the sword of the Spirit, which is God’s word.”*
3. What can you do this week to put on the helmet of salvation?