

Ephesians 15-03-29a

This is Sunday, the 29th of March, 2015. We are in the book of Ephesians, the letter from Paul to the Laodicean church, shared with the Colossian church, carried by Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister, to both of those places. In chapter 6 we have come down to verses 10 and following, where it says, Well, in order that we can be thoroughly equipped for every good work, offensively, and able to stand against the wiles of the devil defensively, we gather and we spend time in encouragement and in fellowship, where our ministry gifts can operate to be a blessing and to enable us to receive a blessing in our fellowship, by whatever means we have that fellowship.

Sometimes it's direct, sometimes it's indirect. But we have a common goal, we have a common enemy, we have a common Savior, we have common provision, and we have a common enthusiasm for the Lord Jesus, for God the Father, an appreciation for God the Holy Spirit, and we have a purpose and a direction. This is something so many people in this life either lack or have established on a foundation of sand.

To waste your life, to expand your effort on things that crumble and disappear is a sad and depressing prospect. One of the reasons depression is so rampant in our culture, and it is rampant, one of the reasons is what I just stated. If you do not know who you are, if you do not have a worthy purpose, one that uplifts you, one that improves you, one that directs your efforts and your goals in what you know to be a wonderful positive direction, you're going to be depressed.

Because it is the only thing that fulfills our souls. We're made in the image of God, and until we are aligned with His purposes, and until we find ourselves in the woven fabric of His plan, you're going to have frustration. You're going to have a frantic search for happiness.

You're going to misdirect, misappropriate, and misspend your time, your youth, your energy, your opportunities. It's doomed to failure. There is only one source of genuine peace, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ bringing us by His grace, by His work, by His merit to the foot of the throne of God the Father.

Well, this is the purpose of our study. This is the purpose of our fellowship. This is why you are here.

You came here on this day, at this time, for this purpose. And the next few minutes that we spend dipping into the water of life from God's Word are valuable because they renew, refresh, and restore our souls. It blesses our hearts, and it invigorates our earthly existence.

It has a purpose. It has focus. It has a direction.

And it's important sometimes to just remember that we are not here to follow a ritual, to express

something habitual. We are here as people on a mission, and it never hurts to review the mission and to clarify the goal and make sure that we are bending every effort, laying aside every weight, and the sin that entangles us so that we can press toward that mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Shall we pray? Father, we are so grateful for the clarity that You bring to our lives, the purpose that You reveal, the reality that transcends the incomplete and inconsistent information we derive from our human senses and from our human conversations and our human points of view.

We thank You that we can see beyond the immediate and the temporal into the eternal realms. We're so thankful for Your grace, for the undeserved favor that You bestow upon us, that You bless us with every day. We thank You for this day.

We thank You for the opportunities that You have brought and are bringing and will bring for us to learn and grow and exercise our spirits using the information, the truth that You have revealed to us, and the ever-present ministry and encouragement of Your Holy Spirit. We thank You most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ. What a tremendous example He is.

We see Him reflected in the mirror of the Old Testament. We see Him through the revelation of the New Testament, seated at Your right hand, waiting for the day when He will receive Your command to stand up and return with the shout, the voice of the archangel and Your trumpet to call us to Himself and to move us into that next phase of Your plan. We want to be ready for that day, and we have gathered this morning before You to pursue that goal, to receive even more from the freshening of Your grace, and to acknowledge our dependence and our gratitude at the same time for all of these wonderful provisions.

We pray that You'll bless us as we spend this time studying Your Word together, give each one of us insight and understanding of the objective truth that we see, and also of its meaning and its pertinence for us individually and as a group. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified, and through Him that Your glory will be revealed in us and through us in the midst of this dark world. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. Again, Ephesians chapter 6, It's finally, my brethren, finally after five and a half chapters of foundation. What is the foundation? If you think about the first few chapters, what's the two-word phrase that characterizes that? In Him.

In Him. Anytime we get distracted, anytime we start relying on ourselves, we start seeing things come unglued, rattle apart, we look in the rear-view mirror and see pieces of our vehicle lying in the road. We need to remember, in Him, I can do all things in Christ, through Christ.

All things. Things now, things in the future. Whatever else, however bad it gets, however short human efforts and human energy and human endeavors fall, however dismal we are or the people around us are, stop and reflect.

Remember, we are in Him. Is Jesus ever going to fail? Is He ever going to fall? Is He ever going to be short of the glory of God? Is He ever going to be a disappointment? No. We're in Him.

We cannot fall off. The very hairs of our heads are numbered. There's not the smallest little bird in the air that falls and God doesn't know about it.

And Jesus, with a slight smile, says, you are worth more than many sparrows. Right? God is paying attention. He has made provision.

There is a purpose in everything. In everything. Never let discouragement get the better of us.

That's the biblical exhortation. We will be discouraged. Was the Lord Jesus discouraged? I mentioned earlier when we quoted our John 11 passage, Jesus did weep on this earth.

He wasn't snapping His fingers, tapping His foot, humming a tune all the time. He was discouraged. He saw disappointment.

He was disappointed in the people around Him for lack of faith. He was disappointed in the entire nation of Israel and the capital city of Jerusalem as He stood on the brow of the hill weeping over it. How often He would have gathered them under His wings as a hen gathers her chicks, He says, but you would have none of Me.

What a tragedy. The physically embodied incarnate Son of God standing in your midst and you miss it. Now, that's something to be alarmed about.

It's possible. Believers do it all the time. Well, Paul is warning us.

He says, look, you're in Him and he has detailed the provision. He has detailed the potential. He has detailed the unifying power that this has because not only are you in Him but the person next to you is in Him.

The person in front of you is in Him. The person behind you in this fellowship is in Him. And because we are in Him, we are united and that requires an element of respect, of consideration.

We saw that in our Philippians 2 passage that was reviewed last Sunday from our Memory Verses. Looking out not only for our own interests but also for the interests of others. Who are those others? The person to your right, the person to your left, the person before, and the person behind.

We do this through intercessory prayer. We do this through a word fitly spoken. Isn't that a great statement from the Proverbs? A word fitly spoken, well-timed, well-thought-out, reflecting God's truth is like apples of gold on trays of silver.

You think, well, can't eat that. But it's the value that is being spoken of. You wouldn't want to.

That's something to cherish and to treasure like you do a family heirloom or a valuable asset. Words fitly spoken. We speak the truth to one another in love.

When we come together, we have a song, a hymn, or a spiritual song. I was tempted, I was thinking about this. We always just ask anybody to stick up their hand and make a request.

I thought, well, because it says, let each one of you have, and it's my responsibility to make sure our worship goes like it should. I thought, you know what I ought to do is just say, make sure everybody has picked out at least one hymn before we get together, and then we'll just say, okay, person X, what's your hymn? Or person Y, what's your hymn? Because I think some don't come together with a song, a hymn, or a spiritual song. Some of our younger members don't always contribute.

And you've got to be ready. It says, let each. It doesn't say let some of you have a song, a hymn, or a spiritual song, does it? Each.

When Brother Matt says, does anyone have a hymn? You should have at least one in your heart. I'm telling you, this is Scripture. This isn't Sam talking.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ through the Apostle Paul saying, when you come together, let each one of you have a song. It doesn't say multiple songs. You just have to have one.

But think about it. And I was asking myself, well, why would I do that, or why would I even think of it? Here's why. What that does is force us to anticipate.

Sometimes we just roll with the flow. When you're a kid, I'm wearing my father's coat this morning. I can't tell you how many times I stared at the back of this coat because I always sat behind my dad when he was driving us to church.

Countless times I can draw from memory every hair on the back of his head, every wrinkle in his neck that he got from long years of working in the sun, and the collar of this coat. I know where the plaid is on the back of this collar. I can't see it now, but I can draw you a picture right now and tell you where the pattern is, because I used to look at him on the way to church.

He would take us to church Sunday by Sunday, sometimes to find a good church. We had to drive 45 minutes to an hour each way to get to a good church. But my parents undertook that responsibility.

They knew how important it was. They thought about it. I didn't think about it.

It's Sunday. Dad's going to load up the car, and I'd better be ready. But I didn't think ahead to the service.

I didn't think ahead why we were going. My parents made that all happen. I was just carried in the

flow.

Don't be carried in the flow when it's time for Christian fellowship, whether it's a formal assembly like this or whether it is time to get together with other believers. We should anticipate. Why does Paul say when you come together, let each one have a song, a hymn or a spiritual song? You know why? Because you have to think ahead.

If I were to require everybody to have a hymn number in their head out of one of our two hymnals, you'd have to plan ahead. You'd have to dig out a hymnal, or when you first got here, grab a hymnal and flip through it, go to the index, or remember something you heard on the radio on the way over. Many times I often play inspirational music in the morning when we're getting ready, and one of those songs will really speak to my heart or stick in my head.

And it's a very strange thing because many times somebody will suggest that very same song and we sing it, or Dan or Anna Lynn will play it as our special. And I think, wow, out of the hundreds of hymns that are available, that one hit me in a special way this morning, and here we are either singing it or listening to it beautifully played. But anticipate.

So I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to have a pop quiz and say, okay, what's your hymn? But I suggest to you warmly and encouragingly from the Word of God that when He says, let each have a song, a hymn, or a spiritual song, in the morning when you're getting dressed, when you're getting ready, as you're doing the last dusting and arranging in the church house or as you're preparing to bring what you bring or piling the car and so on, stop and think about the upcoming assembly. Who is going to be there? Review what you know and think, what would be an uplifting song that reflects biblical truth that we might sing? This is another way that we can fulfill Philippians chapter 2, let this mind be in you, which was in the Lord Jesus.

One of the often overlooked details of the Last Supper evening, you know what I'm going to say? After they had eaten, what did they do? Before they went to the Mount of Olives, they sang a hymn. The Lord Jesus Christ on the night before He was crucified, and it's the only time it tells us they did this, the Lord Jesus with His 11 disciples sang a hymn. I wonder if it was one of the Messianic Psalms reviewing, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Or I look down and I can see all my bones.

They will look on Him whom they have pierced, or some other Old Testament pieces of poetry or hymnology. But the Lord Jesus, one of the last things He did with His disciples before He was arrested was to sing a hymn with them. It's important, and it's in anticipation.

It's another way that we can be a blessing to one another, and it gets us into that mode of realizing that our life is more than food and drink, and it's more than what we see around us and what we wear. The body is more than meat. We live a spiritual existence, and that's what Paul turns to here in Ephesians 6 beginning in verse 10, when he says, ♦Finally, my brethren, my brethren, thinking about the rest of the body of Christ, having laid the foundation of what it is to be

in Him, both vertically and horizontally, He says now, as for the rest, loipos, finally, summing up, be strong where? Where else? In the Lord.

Be strong in Him. Remember who you are and the assets that have been given to you in Christ. Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His strength.

The power of His might. Then he says an interesting thing, and this is an odd metaphor. We're used to it because we've recited it just dozens and dozens of times.

We've committed this to memory. Put on the whole armor of God. But think about the people who first heard this letter read to them in Laodicea and in Colossae and later in other churches around the ancient church environment.

How many of these people are soldiers? Put on the whole 782 gear of the Lord. Put on the web belt. Put on the flak jacket.

Put on the steel pot helmet or the Kevlar helmet. Put on the boots. Grab the M16 or better the M14 or better the M1 or better the 1911 A1.

Grab your weapon. These people are civilians almost exclusively. So when he says pick up your military gear and put it on, it doesn't strike us the way it did them.

This would have been startling. He says put on a bunch of defensive gear and grab some weapons. And you think, well, when it first comes up, he says put on the whole armor.

And this is based on the word hoplite. The hoplites were the ground pounders, the old trees, the infantry guys from the Roman Army. He says grab the gear that the common soldier uses and not just some of it.

Don't just grab a helmet. Don't just put on a flak jacket. You see the police and the FBI guys sometimes they'll put on a flak jacket.

He says no, not that. Everything, the full armor, the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles, the schemes, the plots and plans of the devil. Now, what's the nature of a scheme? Do you come up with it on the fly? Is it a tactic that you just, it's a reaction to the moment? If somebody comes to my door and knocks and I open the door and I see a weapon in their hand pointed at me, whatever I do at that point, if I try to kick it out of their hand, if I slam the door, if I duck out of the way, was that a scheme? Was that something wily? Was that planned ahead? It's a reaction.

It's something I do in the moment. It's either an instinct or a trained response or an expression of panic, whatever it might be. But it's not a wile.

It's not a scheme. So when you think about the wiles of the devil, one thing you know for sure is

he planned ahead. He anticipated.

This is why part of my encouragement this morning from the Word of God to us is to plan ahead and to anticipate because that's what the enemy is doing. Don't just be carried along. People that are carried along wind up being carried along by every wind of doctrine.

Remember that? Rudderless ships. Learning to anticipate, learning to think ahead is part of our spiritual preparation. It's part of our spiritual maturity just like it is in human maturity.

One of the major differences between adults and children is adults think ahead and plan ahead. We can tolerate discomfort because we look ahead. We say, well, this shot in my mouth is a little uncomfortable, but knowing that there's a big high-speed drill about to go into my enamel, I think I'll put up with this because I know in a minute the potential pain could be a lot worse, right? Children don't have that capacity.

That's a function of maturity to think ahead. Thinking ahead allows us to level out. This is like your utility bills.

Some of them have that plan where there's a spike in the summer for electricity or there's a spike in the winter for use of gas. And so they'll say, well, look, instead of you paying \$30 a month in the summer for gas and then paying \$120 for it in the winter when demand is high, we'll level it out. And you just pay \$70 all year long, and we'll level out those spikes so that you can budget and you don't get slammed with winter expenses or summer spike expenses.

Well, this is what looking ahead does. We'll look ahead and we know it's going to be warm in the summer and cool in the winter. So looking ahead, we'll make provision and we'll level things out.

This is anticipation. This is the positive side of a scheme, of a plan, of forethought. Your enemy, the devil, has forethought.

He knows you. He knows what makes you tick. He or his emissaries and representatives and factoti know you.

Do you not think that there's reconnaissance? Especially, especially you. Lots and lots of believers haven't broken the radar profile, but you have. You are on Satan's radar.

You, by name, you sitting here listening to the sound of my voice, you know why? It's a good thing. You do damage. You are not somebody sitting inactive, unimportant, ineffective.

You are effective. That's why you're here. That's why you have been here.

That's why you have listened to the Word of God and you've tried to apply it. And you're striving for the glory of God. You're heading on the upward way, looking to gain those heights, looking to enter through the straight gate.

That makes you dangerous to the enemy and you're on his radar. Now, this isn't just fluff I'm telling you. I am telling you seriously, without any reservation, you are a target.

Your name is on a list among the forces of darkness because you are an effective believer. And this is a fun thing because you're in the game. You're on the field.

It's like you're the defensive tight end while somebody on the offense, on the football team, is going to try to block you, is going to try to take you out of the game. Are they worried about the people sitting on the bench? No. They're on the bench.

You're one of the 11 on the defense and you're out there. So you're a target. Now, should this be a scary thing? This should be an exciting thing.

I played defensive end, and you can see when they're lining up for a running play, and I think, well, there's a good chance they could go off-tackle here on my side of the field, and I need to be ready because one of their primary assignments is going to be to block me. If they're going to run an off-tackle play, they're going to run right between the tackle and the end. They're going to try to block the tackle to the inside.

They're going to try to block the end to the outside and run the fullback or the halfback right through that gap. They're targeting me. And I thought, this is great.

This is why I'm here. I'm not just blocking. What I like to do, because I'm funny that way, is look on the field during a football game, and you're always trying to watch the ball and see what's happening on the ball.

A lot of times during a play, I will watch all of the guys that aren't in the active part of the play. How hard are they blocking when they know that the play is going the other way? The receivers that have a route to run, but they're not going to get the ball. They're not the designated receiver.

Well, if they just slow up and half-hearted run, everybody knows they're not the designated receiver because look at them. They're just flaking out. They're just saving their strength.

They have to look like they're the designated receiver even when they're not to fool the other side. Well, we're on the field. We're in the game.

We're not on the bench. Why? Because we have an understanding of what the plan and purpose of God is. So therefore, make sure you've got your pads on.

Make sure you've got all of your equipment. You don't want to go out there without your helmet, without your mouth guard, without your knee pads, without your – I used to wear – my arms were so skinny. I wore forearm pads for two reasons.

A, to protect my bones, which had nothing between them and everything hitting them, and B, to

try to make me look bigger because I only weighed 130-odd pounds. Playing football when you weigh 130 pounds is near suicide, especially on the line. If I had had good enough hands to catch, it might have been different, but I was on the line.

I was trying to block. For a 210-pound guy to push a 130-pound guy out of the way is not difficult. You have to plan ahead.

You have to be wily. You have to say, I've got to use judo-like things, use his strength and size against him, I would tell myself. It's all futile.

210-pound guy, I don't care what kind of judo moves you know, you're just going to get flattened. I spent most of my football career on the ground. But there is a need for us to think ahead.

Your enemy, the devil, is thinking ahead. He knows you, his team. He may be the coach, and maybe it's the guy right across from you on the line.

It may not be Satan personally, but there is something very extraordinary about Satan. He is much more powerful than your average angel, and I think he knows and keeps in his head the names of a lot of effective believers. I don't know exactly how personal it gets, but Paul says your enemy is the devil himself, and he's planning ahead.

So we need to plan ahead and put on the whole armor of God so that we can stand. Don't spend your playing career on your back in the mud, so that you can stand. And there is a repetition of the idea of standing.

Stand against the wiles of the devil in verse 11. Withstand in verse 13, and having done all, you're still standing. I don't want to be having two or three people picking me up so that I can stand before the judgment seat of Christ, because I got stomped into a mud hole in this life spiritually.

Withstand in the evil day, and having done all, you're still standing. Well, how do we do this? Now, we've talked about this armor before. I've reviewed it in the context of our memory passage.

We've come to this Ephesians section and studied the armor of God in years past. But what we're going to look at when we come back from the break is something that I have not presented before, something I didn't really focus on before, and it's really fascinating. It's not just, what is the helmet, what is the shield, what is the sword? We're more into the realm of, how do you actually do this? How do you remember it? How does it work? If I put it on, am I really just going to stand, or am I going to function and be effective? Well, we'll pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to see that this wonderful provision from God fits into a context. It would be one thing to put on all your football gear and go stand out on the field, but you don't really know how the game works. This is why I didn't get to play baseball as a child.

You have to start in the early single-digit grades, playing if you're ever going to play on the junior high and high school teams. Well, when I went out for baseball as an elementary school kid, I went out there and they gave me a glove, and when it was my turn to bat, they would hand me a bat. I had no concept of how the game worked.

I had a vague notion that you were supposed to hit the ball and then run around and get the home plate. That was it. So when they put me in the field, I was a right fielder, allegedly.

Well, somebody hit the ball into right field, and I said, well, I'm supposed to get the ball. Once I got it, I had no idea what to do with it. Nobody explained to me, if there are runners on base, you want to try to stop them.

You don't just flail the ball somewhere in the general direction of home plate and hope for the best. You need to know how the game works. You need to be aware of how scoring works and which guy you want to get out.

If you've got the ball in your hand and there are guys you can get out with, where do you throw it? Well, you anticipate. You're standing out there in right field. Before the ball ever gets hit, you say, if that ball comes here, I've got to throw it to third base because there's already a guy on second.

And we can force guys out if we start with the foremost runner and we want to get the guys closest to scoring position out. Nobody ever explained that to me. I didn't understand that until I was an adult.

It's tragic. We don't want to be those people standing there with the full armor of God having no clue what the battle is about, which direction to face, how to use it. I would not have you ignorant, brethren.

Remember that? Well, that's what we're going to find out when we come back from the break. How does this stuff actually work? We're going to get suited up in the full armor of God and we're going to know how it works and which direction to point ourselves. Let's stop here and take our break.