

Ephesians 15-04-26a

This is Sunday, the 26th of April, 2015. We're in Ephesians chapter 6 and we are resuming at verse 16. We looked at the feet that are firmly planted on the foundation of the good news of peace.

If you want a fruitful devotional study, all you have to do is begin to look at the topic of peace in the Bible. It is replete. We can never begin to do a complete study of peace.

What God says about the lack of peace for the wicked, there is no peace for them. It is a constant stepping from one sinking log to another. But the peace that passes understanding is our gift.

And the reason it passes understanding, it also passes description and it passes transmission. Those of us who are dwelling in Beulah land, as we sang this morning, have the experience of a peace that is impossible to describe. It isn't something you can put in a bottle and hand to someone else.

You can tell them you have peace and they say, oh yeah, sure. But everybody judges by their own experience. And if they have not experienced that peace, they cannot comprehend it.

The darkness does not comprehend the light. John talks about that in his gospel. It is incomprehensible.

You might as well be describing a vivid, colorful scene to somebody blind from birth. They can try to imagine. They can try to guess.

But the things that we experience as having spiritual sight, being spiritually discerned, are incommunicable to those who are in the darkness outside. Some people like that darkness. It suits them.

They can define their own standard of righteousness. And as long as they meet their very minimal, crude standard, they don't have to be accountable or acknowledge guilt or wrong or shortcoming or failure. It is a very self-serving and self-defeating approach.

But in Ephesians, Paul is talking, and by the way, we are in chapter 6, and the only people still listening are people who care about God and His plan, who love the Lord Jesus Christ and want to live their lives to please and glorify Him. So as we pick up this morning in verse 16, it begins with above all. And that is where we will resume after we pause for a moment to dedicate our time and our study of the Word of God to the Lord Jesus.

Shall we pray?

Father, what a blessing and privilege to make this journey through life sustained by Your grace, sealed with Your Spirit, motivated and enabled by Your Word, with the example and the encouragement of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as our guide, with the provisions to release and remove our sins, to renew us and restore us and put us back on our feet when we fail, and to know that we have a wonderful hope of the future as we strive to develop patience and endurance and focus that survives distraction and deflection in this life, all of this guided and sustained by the anchor in our soul, the words of truth that You've imparted to us in times such as we spend together this morning, looking formally and directly at the truth of Your Word and seeking a better understanding of it.

We pray that each one here will be encouraged, that the truth of Your Word will do its work of breaking up the rocks and the hard places in our souls, that we can be receptive, that the seed of the Word will be planted deep and springing forth with its supernatural power will bring forth fruit, unimpeded and unhindered by the cares of this life and the other things that can choke the Word and make it unfruitful, having been absorbed and made a part of our inner resources, that it will not lay on the surface to be carried away by the machinations and the rationalizations of Satan, that we will grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus and be able to follow Him even as He took up His cross and fulfilled Your plan and purpose, that we can do so as His body on this earth, awaiting the day when You send Him to return for us, and on that day we will celebrate and rejoice knowing that we have run our race and we have completed our tasks and we have overcome by faith.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, it is essential that we understand what it is God has provided for us to navigate this life. One of the first things they teach new recruits is how to put on their uniform so that it doesn't impede them, so that they can move around. Then you start handing them pieces of equipment.

This is how you use an entrenching tool. This is how you use a radio, whatever kind of fancy radios they have now. We had the PRC-77 that had a short tape antenna that had a longer whip antenna and finally had a giant multi-section RC-292 antenna that you could erect with the help of another Marine and in place.

And if you were extremely skillful you could get that thing up without snapping the poles. That was a very dicey proposition. I'm sure that thing's long gone.

I'd kind of like to have one just to put in my front yard and gaze at and show people that I can put one up. But you learn how to use these pieces of equipment and then you're handed your combat gear, your flak jacket, your canteens and your first aid kit, your ammunition pouches and your weapon. And you spend a lot of time at the range learning how to operate the weapon.

You spend time back in the barracks and in the confines of training learning how to field strip and how to detail, disassemble and reassemble your weapon. How to clean it, how to maintain it, how to make sure that it's going to function when you need it and survive adverse conditions. We do all of that before we send anybody out to face the enemy.

It happens first. It is necessary preparation. You have to know these things and they have to become rote.

It has to almost become muscle memory. How to take apart and put together your .45, how to take apart and put together your M16 or your 9mm pistol now. And whatever it is, it has to become something that you can do under pressure, you do without thinking.

It's an instinctive response. You know how to clear a jam if you're an operator of a machine gun, if you operate any other weapons system, whether it's laser guided or some kind of anti-tank system, that you know it so well that anytime something goes wrong you can instinctively fix it. You think about this even driving your car.

You reach the point where your subconscious mind can drive the car. Have you ever been driving down the road and there's some distraction, you know your Pepsi spills in the front or

whatever or somebody calls and because you obey the law you have them on speaker phone and you're not sitting there staring at your phone. A pox on you if you text while you're driving.

And you need to confess that before God because that is a mortal sin. You are endangering yourself and others. It is worse than being drunk to text while you drive.

And I will tell you from the word of God that is a desperately bad thing to do. I can't tell you the dangers I have had to circumnavigate and when I get past the car that is creating the dangerous obstruction in traffic, somebody is texting on their phone. They are sitting at a light that has changed, they're delaying traffic and then they're going to scoot through and force people to try to get through at the last minute and it's all from looking at that accursed phone.

But sometimes you're, maybe you have the thing on speaker phone and you're talking and driving, you're on a long stretch where there aren't a lot of other people you can endanger. But you suddenly realize or maybe you're talking to somebody in the car and you suddenly realize that you've gone several miles and you have no memory of the road. You don't remember the cars you might have passed.

You don't remember the exit signs that you noted and realized you weren't there yet. Your subconscious mind can operate the car and you can go a long way. Did I stay between the lines? Well, I obviously did.

Have I kept a proper speed? Have I done all of the other things? I've moved my foot from the gas to the brake when I needed to. And you pretty much have no memory. I've driven through whole towns talking to Patty and I get to the other side and I think, did we just go through Atoka? I just don't have any memory of it.

Then I stopped at stop signs and change lanes and did whatever I had to do. And it was all auto subconscious reflexive memory. This is the way we want to be in our spiritual life.

We don't have to stop and think, Oh, what do I do now? You know how it is when you first start driving and everything is in the conscious front part of your mind, especially when you're trying to pass a test back when they used to give drivers training in school or you go to a school or maybe it's just your parent. They're teaching you to drive and you're trying to remember everything. You don't want to get, you don't want to make a mistake.

You don't want to be chided and trying to remember the blinker and trying to remember the, is it the gas or the brake? And it's just, it's a great source of stress. Initially. Now we just blindly mindlessly do it without even thinking.

This is the fruit of experience, right? It's long habit. It is getting so used to it that it just is a, it's, it's reflexive putting on this armor and operating and using these provisions of God should be like that for us. Only the extraordinary.

Obviously if you come over a hill and here's a wreck in front of you, now you're driving is back in the front of your mind and you're consciously actively figuring out how to deal with an unusual situation. But in the routine, we, we don't really give it a thought. It's all, it's just force of habit and it happens without conscious, uh, detailed, uh, memory and reconstruction.

So the same thing here, taking up the whole armor of God to be able to withstand in the evil day. That's the exceptional time. That's the charge of the elephant.

We used to say that's the, Oh wow, I have just been bereaved. I have just been bereft. I have just lost my job.

I have just failed a thing I thought I passed, uh, whatever it may be. Something unexpected. That's the evil day.

But having done all to stand, that's your routine. Once you win the victory, you don't say, well, I'm sure glad I was able to serve my country. And you just take everything off and wander out into the no man's land.

Uh, we have having done all having stood in the evil day, we have to continue to stand, uh, in the normal day and function in a, in a routine way. So stand there for having girded your waist with truth. We know what that means.

This is the truth of righteousness and evil. This is the truth of light and darkness. This is the truth of God and Satan.

This is the truth of succeeding or failing of serving or failing to serve of being who we are in Christ or of trading away our inheritance for a mess of pottage. Stand therefore having girded your waist with truth. Absolute truth is a wonderful thing.

People will argue about the finer points as they go through the Bible. That's why we've got so many denominations. But the essential truths of what God says is right, morally right, and what God says is wrong, morally wrong.

There's no question about what God says. There's people who don't like it. There's people who feel like they can disregard it, but it's an absolute standard and absolute standards are great because you always know where you stand with regard to people who share your understanding of that standard.

In the world of Christian faith and particularly in the world of biblical faith, there is wide common agreement on what is and isn't right, what is and isn't moral, what is and isn't acceptable in God's sight because God spells it out so clearly and repeatedly and in a variety of ways, illustrating it, demonstrating it, judging it historically, and explaining why judgment is coming, warning people that they are going to come under judgment because of these practices, because of these patterns. It's very clear. If you have any interest at all, you have no difficulty figuring out what God thinks is right and what God thinks is wrong.

In the world of relativism, in the world in which we now live outside of Christian faith, every man does what is right in his own eyes. You saw how that turned out in the judges. Remember that? Every man did what was right in his own eyes.

Well, how do I know what you're going to do? If you're doing what's right in your eyes, can I count on you to keep a promise? Well, I know I made that promise, but a higher priority in my own mind came up and I couldn't do that. Yeah, I know, you know, we're, we're friends, but, uh, I decided to talk about that confidence you shared with me, with, with my circle of friends, because I just thought they needed to know, or I felt like they, you know, it's just, it's all relative

and, and it is unpredictable and it, it drifts and shifts. It is the sand on which many people build their houses and it all looks great on a sunny day, but when the storm hits and the rains fall and that sand gets flooded, the house crumbles and people are miserable and they are, uh, without recourse because of a lack of a waste girded with truth in an army, in a collection of fellow soldiers who have their wastes girded with the same truth, carrying the same equipment dedicated to the same purpose, right? I know the Marine on my right and I know the Marine on my left has exactly the same attitude, the exact same mission, the same sense of priority, the same understanding of what is required as I do.

And I can count on, and it's, it's a truism at this point that men in battle often wind up fighting on behalf of each other. But one of the reasons they do that is they have a truth in common. It's not just, well, I like Fred and I like Bob and I don't want to see Fred and Bob get killed, so I'll, I'll fight harder.

It is because you are united in a common cause and a common purpose. You have a common understanding, common priority, and you know that you can accomplish more together than you can individually. And you don't have to worry about Bob cutting and running.

You don't have to worry about Fred. They've switched sides now. You don't have to worry about Bob on your right and Fred on your left as you, uh, you know, weave your way forward.

You know that they care about and are dedicated to the very same things. You know what they are going to do in a certain situation because you've all gotten the same training and that creates a fabric of a spree decor and of loyalty and commitment in the horizontal that greatly aids and facilitates service in the vertical. And it is the same.

This is why Paul uses a military metaphor here. He could have said, you know, assemble the full ox cart of God, you know, hook up the ox, be sure he's got the yoke, uh, put on the reins, make sure the wheels are greased, sit on the, he could have used an agricultural metaphor. He could have used any one of a number, but he uses military because no soldier marches forth to fight alone.

You notice even Goliath came out, you know, send forth a champion. He and I will fight in whoever wins. It didn't happen, did it? He got a hole knocked in his head and then there was a big battle.

They, they didn't, they didn't say, Oh, well, Goliath will be your servants. I mean, Goliath said, if he got beat, we'd all, yeah, we'll lay down our arms and march dutifully down there and start hewing wood and hauling water. And that was just a lie.

And when Goliath was slain, the rest of the Philistines, you know, decided they'd better cut and run. So it is a corporate conflict. It is a confederated force that we face.

Paul did not say that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against Satan. Did he? A singular foe? Principalities, powers, rulers, spirituals. There's more than one one.

Well, there needs to be more than one of us. This is the importance of our Christian fellowship and our mutual support, our intercessory prayer, and our looking for ways to exercise the gifts that God has distributed amongst us, whether it is hospitality, whether it is prayer, whether it is a service in many forms. We have people who do any number of things in, in support of our

church, whether it's making sure that it gets recorded and broadcasted, or whether it is hosting and making sure that people are comfortable and able to concentrate, whether it is the materials that we use, the stuff that ends up on the web, our memory verses.

There's, there's the hymns that we sing and the books that we use, and all kinds of other almost unnameable things that take place in our fellowship. It's a wonderful form of service, but it is because we are a group. It is because we share a common understanding and a common mission, common goal.

Stand, therefore, having girded your waist with truth. All of these things I have just rehearsed and reviewed are truths, and when we start getting heavy fire, when we start taking flack, when we start getting resistance and opposition, what do we do? We go back to these truths. Wait a minute, I can't think about this like some ungodly, nameless, unbeliever would think of it.

I've got some truth around my waist, and that's what everything else depends upon, fastens to, hangs on, is stabilized by. So let me go back to my basic truths. We will not stumble so as to fall.

God will never suffer the righteous to be moved. We have resources, we have assets, we have fellow believers, we have the Lord Jesus Christ Himself at the right hand of the Father, and we start by stabilizing ourselves with truth. Fall back on the truth, absolute truth, irrevocable, undeniable, unchangeable truth.

There is, with God, no darkness or shadow of turning. He doesn't change. So, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, be aware that part of that truth is making sure we are right.

We can get into all kinds of trouble if we rush in where angels fear to tread. We have orders to stay. I remember, and I've told you this story before, but I was reading an account of a platoon in Vietnam, and they had been given strict orders.

In fact, it was a policy theater-wide that units, whether a fire team or a squad or any unit of any size, not travel on the roads, to disperse into the jungle on each side, and to proceed cautiously, watching for traps and claymore-type mines, what they call IEDs now, improvised explosive devices. You've got to watch for that kind of stuff, but don't travel the roads. Well, there was a platoon that was going through, and they got tired of hacking their way through the jungle.

It was particularly dense and swampy, and it was hot, and they couldn't get their feet dry. Here they are, and here's a perfectly good road up in the middle. They were on a mission from higher headquarters to get from point A to point B, and by default you're supposed to travel in the jungle, dispersed.

Well, they got tired of it. This was a squad, and they said, to heck with this, or words to that effect, and they got up on the road and started marching down the road. Well, about 15 minutes later, they were all killed because of friendly fire.

Higher headquarters saw a convoy coming and strafed that road, bombed that road, and took out that road, and a bridge that was in the road took out the whole thing, knowing that the men, the friendlies, would be safe because they were well off the road in the jungle. Well, they weren't, and they were killed by friendly fire because they disregarded their instructions. They thought they knew better, and what's it going to hurt? It seems safer to me to be on the road than in the jungle.

Well, it's their own fault. This is why we have to have the breastplate of righteousness. Be sure that we're right.

If something is wrong, we need to check and be sure it isn't us. Sometimes people say, you know, no matter situation after situation, it always turns bad. You know, I always end up having this and that and the other, and you begin to realize that the common denominator in every one of these situations is you.

Maybe you need to go back and check and be sure the breastplate of righteousness is on. If things keep going sour time after time, you can keep ascribing it to the unseen forces of darkness, but we need to be sure it's not us. I don't understand why there's honking horns every time I go through an intersection.

Well, maybe I'm running the lights. Breastplate of righteousness, having shod your feet with the preparation, and we talked about the fact that this isn't the magic boots of peace. Our feet need to be standing on the confidence, the foundation, this preparation.

This is like preparing to build a house. You lay a foundation. You've got a solid structure.

You've got a good plan. The architect has made sure that the walls are going to bear the load, that it's not going to weave back and forth and crack all your walls when the rain descends and then when you have a dry spell. Here in Texas, I doubt there's a house that's ever been built in Texas that doesn't eventually have cracks in the sheetrock because of the gumbo that we sit on.

This all used to be seabed. You want a solid foundation, and it is the good news of peace. Ultimately and finally, we have peace with God.

We have peace with each other. We just have to be sure that we are righteous. Then above all, verse 16, we pick up here this morning, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.

The question we closed with last week was, why are there two layers here? We already have the breastplate of righteousness, so why do I need the shield of faith? If everything is going to get deflected by my impermeable, unobtainium breastplate, my can't-pierce-it-no-matter-what breastplate, what do I need a shield for? Fire away! It's just going to bounce off my breastplate of righteousness. Why do we need a shield of faith? Well, here's the thing. What does the shield of faith specifically do? What's your verse say? It quenches the fiery darts.

You can get into a lot of isagogics here. You can talk about the ancient Roman soldiers and what their shields were made of, but many times if they knew that they were going to face an enemy that was famous for using fiery darts, they would soak their leather and oaken shields. You know, there's metal strapping and stuff, but you can't, a solid bronze, a solid iron shield is going to get extremely heavy over time.

This is the constant battle they have trying to design equipment. That's why everybody loves Kevlar. It's strong, but it's light.

So to keep the shield light, parts of it were wood, parts of it were leather, and then it would be reinforced and held together with iron and that. But back in those days, they didn't have stainless steel. Iron would rust and took constant care.

But when they were going into battle against somebody that was known to use fiery darts, soak the thing in water. Makes it a little heavier, but fiery dart comes in and gets quenched. Doesn't get into your clothing.

You may have a breastplate of righteousness on, but your clothes are made out of cloth and leather and stuff. And if you get hit with a fiery dart, you're going to wish you'd had that wet shield. Now, what kind of water do you think you would put on your shield of faith? How about living water? How about the washing of water by the Word? How about the living water that the Lord Jesus provides? It's exceptional water.

Jesus says, you know, you can pull water out of this well up here in Samaria and you're going to thirst again. I've got water. When you drink it, you'll never be thirsty.

So you've got that shield of faith specifically to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. Now, what happens? You may be righteous and you may have girded your waist with truth, but if you're not operating in faith, Satan has ways of setting you on fire. And if you've ever seen somebody set on fire, if you've ever witnessed this in person or seen a film of somebody that gets too close to the birthday cake, or I've seen countless examples of somebody who, even Michael Jackson, remember when he was doing that Pepsi commercial, his hair got set on fire, he got too close to a pyrotechnic and set his head on fire.

When people are on fire, they are lively. They are in a panic. They don't remember their lines.

They don't remember what they were doing. They don't continue to dance. Whatever they were doing, there's only one priority.

I'm on fire. Sometimes they can't even remember to stop, drop and roll or do the classic thing. People have to tackle them and have to put the fire out on their behalf because it's really difficult to put a fire out on yourself.

You usually need help. Somebody get a fire extinguisher. Somebody roll you in the dirt.

Somebody pat you out with smothering or whatever. The fiery darts of the wicked one. Now, we talked earlier about the plurality of principalities, powers, rulers and spiritual hosts, but notice the fiery darts of the wicked one.

These are things that originate with Satan. And what is it that originates with Satan that doesn't originate with the principalities and powers? Principalities and powers and rulers, spiritual hosts, they can try to impede our progress circumstantially. They can incite people who are under their influence to say and do a lot of things.

But the fiery darts that come from Satan himself, what's unique about those? These are ideas. These are points of view. These are philosophies.

These are arguments sourced in him. He delegates the ideas of the implementation of these things to his dark hench persons, hench spirits. But this is straight from the source.

What do we know about fire in the Bible? What does James say about the tongue being a fire that is ignited by the flames of hell? This is talk. We're back to the garden. We're back to the serpent.

We're back to the implantation of ideas. And without faith, if you don't believe God, you don't believe his word, you don't believe in the realities that are revealed to us in the spiritual realm by this spiritual collection of truth, you're going to fall for what originates in the fire. The tongue is set on fire by hell itself.

And if it gets past the shield of faith, I don't care how nice a person you are or how righteous you think you are, you're going to get set afire. And that's never a good thing. I don't think anybody has ever said, you know, I've got a little problem here.

I think what I really need is to be set on fire. I've got a hive thing going. I've got some psoriasis or some eczema.

You know, my dandruff is kind of bad. What I really need is to be set on fire. That'll cure me.

They're even finding out that people that do a very moderate form of that in a tanning bed are just giving themselves cancer. It's like, well, I'm young and good looking. Why don't I give myself skin cancer? I'll just lay in this tanning bed for a while and bombard all of my molecules with radiation.

And now pretty soon I'll start getting lumpy and they'll be cutting parts of my nose off and this will be great. It's silly to get set on fire when fire is nothing but destructive. Nothing but destructive.

Fiery darts of the wicked one. This is talk. This is ideas.

This is philosophy. This is the poison blended into the cup that we drink out of entertainment. And you've got to have your shield of faith to quench those darts to know better, to not be fooled.

Or, your breastplate of righteousness isn't enough. Your waist girded with truth is not enough. It's a good starting point, but we have got to have active faith.

The thing about a shield is it's on your arm. It's active. You can maneuver it.

You can use it to actively stop the trajectory of fiery darts. It's an active thing. Your breastplate, you strap it on, it's there.

It either works or it doesn't. But the shield is something you operate. It's something you consciously use.

Shield of faith. Quench with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one if you hold it up. If you have it properly doused with that living word, living water.

If you are paying attention and watching for fiery darts, recognizing them when they come and sticking that shield in the way before the thing strikes you and sets you on fire. That's the purpose of a fiery dart. It's to ignite you, to destroy you, to get you so busy trying to preserve yourself, you are no factor in the battle.

You're now all concerned with yourself. You've become totally subjective, totally consumed with trying to solve your own personal problem. You are not a factor in the battle anymore.

Quench the dart. Well, this brings us to verse 17 and the helmet of deliverance, the helmet of salvation. We'll look at that when we come back from the break.