

Bible Lessons



“Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Ephesians 6:13

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THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1ST QUARTER 2021

THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD

Greetings in this brand new year! We face new challenges, new horizons, new trials. By the grace of God, we trust there will be new victories. That is the theme of this series of lessons—the victory Christ gives us as we stand strong in HIS strength and put on the full armor of His truth, righteousness, gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and Word. Just the mention of these powerful weapons fills my heart with courage!

The Reflections articles in this series have been written by young people. Brothers and sisters, single and married, at both the “younger” and “older” end of the “young people” list, and from all over the country—they have shared their battles and victories. I know you will enjoy their testimonies!

—Angela Gellenbeck

JANUARY 3, 2020

WE WRESTLE (Contending with Evil Spirits)

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

13 Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

MEMORY VERSE: Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of

his devices. —II Corinthians 2:11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: As Christian soldiers, our strength only comes from God, who empowers us to stand against Satan's wiles while we fight, not carnally, against people, but spiritually, wrestling against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ephesians 6:10 "Be strong in the Lord": be empowered within; be strengthened; go from strength to strength; increase more in strength in the inner man. The idea is not just passive strength, but an active power to fight. "The Latin versions have confortamini; a reminder of the true idea of "comfort" or "comforter" in older English usage" (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges). According to Dictionary.com, the origin of comfort is Middle English confortien, a variant of confortien (Anglo-French) and late Latin confortare (to strengthen), equivalent to con- plus -fortare, a verbal derivative of Latin fortis (strong). To comfort is "to lessen the sadness or sorrow of someone and to strengthen by inspiring with hope and restoring a cheerful outlook" (Dictionary.com). It is inspiring to note that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, is sent to us, not to merely give cheer or sympathy, but to actually strengthen us inwardly and empower us for battle.

Ephesians 6:11 "Whole armour": full armor; complete set; every weapon needed to wage successful warfare; panoply (Greek), offensive and defensive. "Wiles": schemes sought out for deceiving; tactics; tricks; the stratagems of a skillful leader. From the Greek word methodeia, root of the English word method. "A way of searching after something; an inquiry; a method. Organized evil-doing; well-crafted trickery" (HELPS Word Studies). "Satan does not openly appear. He approaches us not in repulsive forms, but comes to recommend some plausible doctrine, to lay before us some temptation that shall not immediately repel us. He presents the world in an alluring aspect; invites us to pleasures that seem to be harmless, and leads us in indulgence until we have gone so far that we cannot retreat" (Barnes' Notes on the Bible). "Devil": derived from the ecclesiastical Greek word, diabolos, meaning slanderer; false accuser. The late Latin term was diabolus, from which came the Italian diavolo, French diable, Spanish diablo, German Teufel, and Old English deofol; hence, the present English devil. (Teufel is Old High German tiufal, from Latin via Gothic diabaulus).

Ephesians 6:12 “We wrestle”: our wrestling; from a word meaning to sway; vibrate or shake; struggle; conflict; contest. “Flesh and blood”: mere human powers. “Principalities”: angelic powers; from Greek arche, meaning “beginning,” or “first place,” or “chief,” referring to the “prince of this world” as Jesus said in John 12:31. “Powers”: (Greek exousias) authority; domain; force or influence. “The rulers of the darkness”: (Greek kosmokrator; used only one time in the New Testament) the world-rulers of this darkness (Revised Version); world-ruler, referring to satan and his demonic powers. “Whether in the prevalence of vice and error; of superstition and magic arts; of infidelity, atheism, or antinomianism [relating to the view that Christians are released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law]; of evil customs and laws; of pernicious fashions and opinions...we are to make war on all these forms of evil, and never to yield in the conflict (Barnes’ Notes on the Bible). “This world”: an age or cycle of time; especially this present age. “Spiritual wickedness”: wicked spirits, and their influences on earth; the spiritual hosts of wickedness or elements or forces of wickedness. “High places”: heavenly places; “the air” (Ephesians 2:2); the scene of the combat, or the “kingdom of heaven, being the region in which Christians contend with the enemies of God” (Expositor’s Greek Testament). See Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7-11.

Ephesians 6:13 “Withstand”: stand your ground; resist; oppose. “The evil day”: the day of temptation; the day when you are especially violently assaulted by satan; “Any felt crisis of the soul’s resistance” (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges). “Looking back on our own evil days, we must all be aware that our defeats have mainly come from one or other of the two errors which lie so near us all, and which are intimately connected with each other—the one being that of fighting in our own strength, and the other being that of leaving unused our God-given power” (MacLaren’s Expositions).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul’s description of Christian warfare and full suit of armor (panoply) in Ephesians 6 follows several chapters with Christian unity as the theme, lessons on Christian behavior and a beautiful outlay of marriage and how it portrays the mystery of Christ and His bride, the church. After his exhortation on varying domestic duties, in closing he gives a general charge to all: “Finally,” or what remains, or what you still have to do, he declares, is to be done and can only be done in the strength of the Lord Jesus. He then goes on to describe the significance and strength of the opposition along with a full description of the essential

pieces of spiritual weaponry; probably inspired by his view of the suit of armor on the Roman soldier guarding his own prison from which he wrote the epistle.

The Bible student will recall past studies of the literal battles and warfare of the Israelites in the Old Testament. The principles given then apply spiritually now. Let us consider a few:

“The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace (Exodus 14:14).

“Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:9).

“There is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few” (I Samuel 14:6).

“The battle is the LORD’S” (I Samuel 17:47).

“And, behold, God himself is with us for our captain” (II Chronicles 13:12).

“The children of Judah prevailed, because they relied upon the LORD God of their fathers” (II Chronicles 13:18).

“Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s” (II Chronicles 20:15).

“Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed...for there there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles” (II Chronicles 32:7-8).

When Paul says to the Christian soldier, “Be strong in the Lord,” it is but an echo of the battle cry from ages past!

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. In the etymology of the word comfort, what meaning and language origin has to do with being strong?
2. What is the Greek word for “full armor”?
3. Our English word _____ comes from the Greek word for “wiles.”
4. Name and describe the foes against whom we wrestle.

5. For every Old Testament scripture reference in the Lesson Background, name the places and people in each scenario.

LIFE APPLICATION

When the admonition comes, “Be strong in the Lord,” let us answer like David, “My help comes from the LORD! I come in the name of the LORD!” We can know that “greater is He who is in you, than he that is in the world.” Let us take courage and have utmost confidence in our God of battles who fights for us and empowers us from within.

When made aware of the wily foe who seeks out methods for deceiving, let us not relax nor sit down, but stand up and suit up until we are prepared by seeking God for His FULL ARMOR.

When the reminder comes, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood,” let us consider that and deal kindly and wisely with our fellow humans. They are not enemies; our battles are not with them.

When we are enlightened by the knowledge that our struggle is against “principalities, powers and the rulers of the world’s darkness,” let us be sober and vigilant, praying in the Spirit, so that we are not caught off guard, but are able to identify the enemy. The Holy Spirit can warn us, “This is the spirit of fear.” “That is the spirit of envy.” “You’re dealing with an unclean spirit.” Or, “This person operates under a spirit of division.” It is the design of the enemy that people would be naive to the seriousness of the battle or even deny the existence of the spirits with whom we wrestle. While we are confident the victory is ours through Christ, it is crucial to be vigilant and constantly aware; to be savvy to the avenues and operations of the adversary.

Scripture tells us that many spirits have gone out into the world; therefore, we can not believe every spirit to be of the truth (I John 4:1). There are doctrines of devils (I Timothy 4:1); there are devils working miracles (II Thessalonians 2:9-10; Revelation 16:14); there are unclean spirits (Revelation 16:13) that come from the mouth of the dragon (pagan, occult religions), the beast (apostate “Christian” organizations), and the false prophet (Eastern religions, Islam, Mormonism, cults, etc.). I believe these are the kinds of spirits described by

“spiritual wickedness in high places.” Babylon, described in Revelation chapters 17 and 18 as both a purple and scarlet-clad harlot and a great fallen city (apostate Christianity), is said to be the hold of every foul spirit. Many, Jesus warned, would be deceived by the many false prophets in the last days.

In this “evil day,” when we know we have “done all”—when we have done the best we could—let us just firmly stand.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

A few months ago, I was struck with an intense battle from the enemy. I was unprepared, much to my dismay. The enemy had been messing with my mind and insecurities for a little bit before this time but not nearly as intense. This time it came strong and hard. Accusations and doubts came from Satan himself that I knew were not true, yet it bothered me so much that the devil would think such things of me. He started torturing me with questions and doubts. “What if God isn’t real? What if the word of God isn’t true?” and other things that had to do with my identity. Though I knew it was from the enemy, I still struggled with why he was doing this to me. Through this trial, I have learned that the devil doesn’t care who you are and he doesn’t care what he tries to get you to do. There is a lot of evil in this world, and it is not surprising that he tries to bring it among the saints of God.

In my swirling mind of fears and doubts that came from the enemy, Jesus was and always has been right there beside me. He’s always been there to bring truth to my mind when the devil would bring lies. He gave me scriptures and inspiration that have drawn me closer to Him and enabled me to fight off the enemy. A few of these scriptures were: “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7).

And this passage in Philippians 4 that gave me a recipe on how to receive peace: “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any

virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:6-9).

I had been searching and seeking for peace and quiet from the [attacks of the] devil. And I learned that sometimes God doesn't quiet the storm around us, but he can quiet us and give us peace! Asking for that peace and doing those things like the scriptures above say, smites satan in the face, and he has no power on us. Since then, I've been learning to call on God to give me peace and help when satan throws his accusations at me. And you know what? It's not as bad. And I'm extremely thankful for that!

Do I still hear satan in the background sometimes? Yes, I am still fighting! But I know now where my happiness, peace and victory comes from. My God of Peace. Stay encouraged!

—Natalie Sorrell, MO

JANUARY 10, 2021

WE WRESTLE (Contending with the Flesh)

Romans 13:12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

I Thessalonians 5:5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

II Timothy 2:1 Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

4 No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

I Peter 2:11 Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

MEMORY VERSE: And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. —I Corinthians 9:25-27

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In addition to the opposition of evil powers of the devil, our warfare also involves a hand-to-hand, daily conflict with our flesh and its desires, through which our adversary seeks to entangle and distract us from our high calling as a soldier of light.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Romans 13:12 “Night”: the period of time before Christ’s second coming. “Day”: the second coming of Christ.

Romans 13:13 “Honestly”: becomingly, decorously, decently, as when others are watching. “Rioting”: drunken feast which hosted unbridled immorality; wild, furious, ecstatic party or festival; unclean or dissolute songs. “Chambering”: promiscuity. “Wantonness”: conduct shocking to public decency; wanton violence; brutality; lewdness. Unclean and sodomitical practices. “Strife”: contention. “Envyng”: jealous anger.

I Thessalonians 5:6 “Sober”: to abstain from wine; be calm, vigilant, discreet. “Especially should Christians live with such vigilance and soberness as to be always prepared to meet the Son of God. What Christian can think it appropriate for him to go up to meet his Saviour from the theater, the ballroom, or the brilliant worldly party?” (Barnes’ Notes on the

Bible).

II Timothy 2:3 “Endure hardness”: endure hardship and affliction; take your share in suffering; endure evil. “Soldier”: from a word that means the encampment of troops; a “camper-out.” This brings to mind someone who has left the ease and comfort of civilian life and is purposefully enduring the hardships of living in the wild for a specific cause and calling.

II Timothy 2:4 “Chosen”: enlisted or enrolled.

I Peter 2:11 “Strangers”: non-citizen; temporary dweller. “Those who are in a strange house, a house not their own” (Benson Commentary). “Pilgrims”: sojourner; someone passing through; exile. “Those who are in a strange country, and among a people not their own” (Benson Commentary). “Abstain”: keep away from; hold back. “Fleshly lusts”: pertaining to the animal nature; carnal, sensual appetites; soft pleasures.

I Corinthians 9:25 “Striveth”: enters the arena or the stage as a combatant; from a Greek root from which we get the English word “agonize.” “Is temperate”: to exercise self-control or dominion from within.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The apostle Paul used two metaphors in the scriptures we have quoted in this lesson: that of an enlisted soldier and that of a combatant in the Olympic (Grecian) games. The soldier had to avoid entanglement in civilian affairs. “The legionary soldiers among the Romans were not permitted to engage in husbandry, merchandise, mechanical employments, or anything that might be inconsistent with their calling” (Clarke’s Commentary). Contenders for the games were also under rigid discipline. “The candidate for the races was required to be ten months in training, and to practice in the gymnasium immediately before the games, under the direction of judges who had themselves been instructed for ten months in the details of the games. The training was largely dietary. Epictetus says: ‘Thou must be orderly, living on spare food; abstain from confections; make a point of exercising at the appointed time, in heat and in cold; nor drink cold water nor wine at hazard’” (Vincent’s Word Studies).

What is the chronology of the writings mentioned in the lesson today? I Thessalonians is the first epistle written by Paul, followed shortly by the second epistle, in A.D. 52. The Epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth in the winter of A. D. 56-57. He wrote to the Corinthians in A. D. 57, following with II Corinthians around a year later. The epistles to

Timothy were written later, around A. D. 64 and 67. Peter wrote his epistles later in his life, probably A. D. 66.

These epistles were directed to a wide audience: Peter's messages took in "strangers scattered" around western Asia, which included "Christian churches in Asia Minor, composed primarily of converted Jews and proselytes, but including many converts from paganism" (ATS Bible Dictionary). Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, probably "a mixed church of Jews and Gentiles, the latter perhaps being the more numerous. These Gentile converts, however, were not for the most part native Romans. All the literature of the early Roman church was written in the Greek tongue" (Smith's Bible Dictionary). Paul sent epistles to Corinth and other cities in Greece, to Thessalonica, and to Timothy at Ephesus.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The epistles to the Romans and to the Thessalonians both show the contrast between children or soldiers of the day, or _____, and children of the night, or _____.
2. What deeds are listed as of the night?
3. What weapons are included as the armor of light?
4. What disciplines are alluded to for the soldier? For the combatant?
5. What spiritual disciplines can you list from the scriptures in today's lesson?

LIFE APPLICATION

The apostles' messages, directed toward converted Jews and Gentiles alike, compose a clear picture of the contest in which we as Christians are engaged. Not only do we wrestle against the prince of the power of the air, with his evil spirits who assail with wiles and fiery darts; and deceptive powers in the religious world, but we face another daily foe—the desires of our own flesh. The calling of a soldier and the conquest for mastery each require the rigors of discipline; their crown is corruptible, but the Christian's contest is for eternal rewards. If the secular world recognizes the necessity of physical discipline, why can't the Christian accept it as well? Yet popular "Christian" teachers downplay self-denial as "legalism."

The warning from Peter emphasizes the importance of bringing fleshly desires under control. They “war against the soul.” Paul clearly shows that drunkenness, spiritual lethargy, all forms of immorality and indecency, strife, envy, and entanglement (over-involvement) in worldly affairs are all part of the spiritual darkness of this world.

Last week’s lesson revealed who rules the darkness; today we are studying the many aspects of this darkness. Evil spirits use worldly allurements to our flesh as their way of entering into the citadel of our hearts and wreaking havoc. Behind every inordinate desire of the flesh is a spirit waiting to control. Perhaps if young people could remember that truth they would be twice as careful to avoid suggestive and provocative clothing, books, music and other media. They would never yield to the addictive beverage, drug, or pornographic picture the first time it is enticingly offered. They would pray more wholeheartedly against the spirits of uncleanness in alternate lifestyles. They would see the importance of keeping even the legitimate desires and appetites of the body within the Holy Spirit’s control. Most of all, they would seek to be suited with God’s full armor.

Ask yourself this question when navigating the dangerous sea of amusement, recreation, and sensual enjoyment of this world: Is this of darkness or of the light?

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Thank God for His love and mercy to us! He died for us so that we could have victory in our lives.

I got saved, but struggled with a YouTube addiction. I prayed about it and tried to not watch, but couldn’t stay victorious. I got so tired of it and cried out to the Lord over and over to get delivered, but I still couldn't get lasting victory.

I went to the international camp meeting in Monark Springs, Missouri. One night, a message was preached about movies and videos. The message really hit me, but I thought, “I don’t have to go down to the altar since I’ve been praying about that already.” I couldn’t get peace. Finally, I decided to go down and pray. Thank the Lord for His mercy! That night He delivered me from my addiction and gave me complete victory!

If I wouldn't have yielded to God's call then, I believe that I would have been in bondage to that addiction much longer. It is important to listen to His voice. When He calls us, the time is

right!

I still have to be careful with what I do on the internet. It's something I could easily fall back into. I set some rules for myself to keep myself out of trouble, and I've found that God has blessed and honored me for it. He gives me strength when I keep Him first, and I'm very grateful for that! Thank the Lord!

You can be victorious through God's power too! God bless you!

—A Christian Soldier

JANUARY 17, 2021

GIRDED WITH TRUTH

Psalm 17:4 Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer.

Psalm 40:11b Let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.

Psalm 51:6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom.

Psalm 91:4 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Psalm 107:20 He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions. (See also Matthew 8:16.)

Psalm 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

John 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.

Titus 2:3 The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

4 That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children,

5 To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that

the word of God be not blasphemed.

6 Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

1 Peter 1:13 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

MEMORY VERSE: Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. —Ephesians 6:14

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's Word and truth (which we bind about our inward affections, thoughts, feelings and emotions), preserves, heals, and keeps us from the subtle insinuations, suggestions, temptations and accusations of the enemy; causes us to stay in the safe path; keeps us from sinning, and makes us strong, wise and holy.

WORD DEFINITIONS

"Psalm 17:4 "I have kept": I have watched or observed, in order to avoid.

Psalm 40:11 "Preserve": watch; guard; keep.

Psalm 51:6 "Inward parts": dark, hidden spaces; inmost thought.

Psalm 91:4 "Truth": God's spoken testimony and judgment; divine instruction; firmness and faithfulness of God. "Buckler": bulwark; something surrounding the person.

Psalm 107:20 "Healed": to mend or stitch together; repair; cure; make whole.
"Destructions": a pit.

Psalm 119:11 "Hid": laid up; stored; treasured. "Heart": seat of the appetites, emotions, passions, morale.

John 17:17 "Sanctify": purify internally; make holy.

Titus 2:5 “Discreet”: safe and sound in mind; prudent; self-controlled; correctly (divinely) balanced. From a Greek root, phren, which is also “the root of ‘diaphragm,’ the inner organ (muscle) that regulates physical life, controlling breathing and heart-beat” (HELPS Word Studies). The diaphragm controls the tone of a singer.

Titus 2:6 “Sober-minded”: to think shrewdly; to be safety-minded; to have true balance and moderation. Also from the Greek root phren, alluding to the diaphragm.

I Peter 1:13 and Ephesians 6:14 “Gird up”: take out the slack; tighten the belt; be prepared. “Loins”: the reproductive area; seat of generative power. “Mind”: disposition of thought, reasoning, insight, and speech; the faculty of understanding, feeling and desiring. “Sober”: not intoxicated; having presence of mind and clear judgment; free of illusion.

I Peter 1:14 “Not fashioning”: not identified with the same shape, form or expression; not following the same mold or pattern.

LESSON BACKGROUND

It was the firm belief of the Psalmist that the commandments—the truth—of God had power to preserve, shield, and keep him from the evil ways of sin (Chapters 17 and 40). David’s confession of sin in chapter 51 contained his acknowledgement that God desired truth and wisdom to be in his inward parts. David’s grievous sin awakened in him a desperate cry, again and again, for God to keep him from further transgression. In the 91st Psalm, God’s truth and commands were recognized as a weapon which both shielded and pierced; a full-body shield. The 107th Psalm, probably written after the captivity, celebrated God’s mercy and deliverance to His people. Again, the power of God’s word in answer to their cry unto him in trouble was what sent healing and salvation. The writer of the 119th Psalm, in answer to the question, “How shall a young man cleanse his way?” gives the treasuring up, or assimilating the Word of God into one’s very heart and character, as part of the answer to inner purity and prevention from sin.

Jesus repeated the concept several times in His ministry. His prayer in John 17 was that His disciples would be sanctified in heart and life by the truth of God’s Word. It is one thing to read or know what God has said; it is quite another to obey it and allow it to work a cleansing of the conscience, character, and conduct.

The admonitions of both Paul and Peter to “gird” the “loins” contain important

comparisons of the tender, vulnerable organs of the body's reproductive system to the spiritual origin and seat of reproduction of the feelings, emotions and affections, which directly affect the actions and entire direction of an individual. To both men and women, old and young, Paul gave the command to be sober and discreet—sound in mind, inwardly controlled, emotionally stable. As the Psalmist and Jesus have already established, it is only God's truth—girding up, taking up any looseness, cinching in and providing support—which can accomplish the stability, discipline, and safety in this critical area.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What kept the Psalmist from the paths of the destroyer?
2. What important power did David recognize was desired by God to safeguard his inward thoughts and desires?
3. According to Psalms 40, 107 and 119, what power heals, preserves and keeps from sin?
4. For what did Jesus pray that would produce holiness in the hearts of His believers?
5. Discuss the importance of girding up the emotional and mental faculties with God's truth.

LIFE APPLICATION

The personal, practical application of the lesson is found in the admonition Titus was to give to the men and women of the church: be sober; be controlled mentally and emotionally. We live in a world corrupted by generations of unbridled lusts and physical desires. The resulting mental chaos and emotional ruin is underlined by rampant alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence. Chemical dependence can be found in any family, among any socio-economic group or age sector. How are we to escape? Is there a positive answer? Is there a way to stop the generational tendencies in a family?

The answers lie in the "grace and truth" which come by Jesus Christ. Our lesson states that we must put on this particular piece of protective armor. In the passage in Romans 13, we are to put on Christ. We do this by assimilating HIS WORD into the mind and inner being.

What truth checks the “God doesn’t love me” attack at the door? “I have loved thee with an everlasting love.” “I am persuaded that neither death, nor life... shall be able to separate us from the love of God...” “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love...”

What truth sends the “God has forsaken me” demon reeling? “For he hath said I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear...”

How do we combat “Why does God allow me to suffer?” “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.” “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons.” “That we might be partakers of His holiness.” “For our light affliction...worketh for us...”

What steels us against worry and fear? “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God...shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” “Fear thou not; for I am with thee; be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee...”

Weave these powerful strands into an unbreakable, cohesive, protective unit and bind it securely around you! Shield your mind, your affections, and your emotions from pride, lust, anger, fear. It has often been said that the armor in Ephesians 6 doesn’t include a shield for the back. But wait a minute. This piece wraps completely around you. You may have retreated for a moment. You may even be on your face on the ground, bleeding. But you can tighten your belt of truth and stabilize those wounds, get back up and face the enemy again.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I went through a trial where the enemy convinced me that my imperfectness meant that God did not love me. I know that sounds ridiculous, but the enemy had me believing that. One night I started praying and asking the Lord to show me His love. I opened up my Bible and my eyes landed on Romans 8, verses 38-39, which read, “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” It was like a wave of God’s love

immensely overflowed me! Nothing in this world can separate us from God's love, not even our imperfectness. I got so caught up in the fact that I wasn't perfect that I let the enemy convince me that I never could be. But I realized that on my own I never will be. It's only through Christ's love and salvation that we can be made whole and perfect.

As humans we are faulty, incomplete, and imperfect because sin and the fall of man separated us from God. He wants us to look to Him for our completeness! Only through Him can our every need be satisfied. Trials will still come and the enemy will still fight, but only through Him can we make it out with victory. In the past I have made the mistake of going through my trials alone. God has always been there waiting for me to grab hold of His hand, but I pushed the conviction away and tried to do it on my own. Every time I failed, and we will fail every single time we do it on our own. During this trial the enemy told me that God was done with me because I failed to turn to Him. I began to feel that God wouldn't want me back after I tried to do it on my own. But God showed me that He loves and cares for His children. Our flesh is so quick to make mistakes, but we have to make the conscious decision to be guided by the Holy Spirit every day. God gave us the tools to fight our battles. He gave us the Holy Spirit to follow and the word of God to teach us, and that is what we must rely on.

I am so thankful that Jesus came down to this earth and died for me. It still blows my mind that Jesus came knowing that many would make mistakes, backslide, and that many would even deny Him. But He still chose to die on the cross to save us all. I am so thankful for the love of God and the promise that He will never leave me nor forsake me! When you feel like you've failed, don't scurry to a corner and write yourself off. Get back up and run to Jesus! We will never be perfect, but God will continue to work on us if we seek after Him. Each day is another chance to walk in the footsteps of our Savior. The sole fact that God gave you another day proves that He loves you and hasn't given up on you.

—Haleigh Edwards, OK

JANUARY 24, 2021

CHRIST THE MIGHTY WARRIOR WEARING THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Isaiah 59:16 And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained

him.

17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

Isaiah 63:1 Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

2 Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?

3 I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.

4 For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

5 And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.

6 And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury, and I will bring down their strength to the earth.

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

MEMORY VERSE: Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee. —Psalm 45:3-5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The scriptures present a majestic picture of Christ as a mighty warrior clothed in blood-stained vesture, sustained by a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation; with eyes of fire and a powerful sword; a triumphant commander of a white-horse army, going forth in vengeance and righteousness to conquer the nations and wage war against his adversaries.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 59:16 “And he saw that there was no man” (also Isaiah 63:5, “I looked”): the often repeated (Isaiah 41:28; 50:2; Ezekiel 22:30) dilemma that there was no man worthy to redeem God’s creation. “The absolute isolation of the avenger and redeemer is emphasized again and again. Nothing but his own indomitable and righteous zeal against evil had sustained him” (Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers).

Isaiah 59:17 “Righteousness”: justice; uprightness; the whole sum of Christian character and conduct in one word, transcending all earthy morality; moral rectitude. “Rectitude: In morality, rightness of principle or practice; uprightness of mind; exact conformity to truth, or to the rules prescribed for moral conduct, either by divine or human laws. Rectitude of mind is the disposition to act in conformity to any known standard of right, truth or justice; rectitude of conduct is the actual conformity to such standard. Perfect rectitude belongs only to the Supreme Being. The more nearly the rectitude of men approaches to the standard of the divine law, the more exalted and dignified is their character. Want of rectitude is not only sinful, but debasing” (Webster’s Dictionary 1828). “Vengeance”: just retribution, recompense, or punishment by God against the adversary. “Zeal”: the ardor of God for His people; especially in battle against His rivals and adversaries.

Isaiah 63:3, 5, 6; “Fury”: displeasure; wrath; heat; zeal against the adversaries of the church. Matthew Henry offers this viewpoint: “The prophet, in vision, beholds the Messiah returning in triumph from the conquest of his enemies, of whom Edom was a type. Travelling,

not as wearied by the combat, but, in the greatness of his strength, prepared to overcome every opposing power. Messiah declares that he had been treading the wine-press of the wrath of God (Revelation 14:19; 19:13), and by his own power, without any human help, he had crushed his obstinate opposers, for the day of vengeance was determined on, being the appointed season for rescuing his church. Once, he appeared on earth in apparent weakness, to pour out his precious blood as an atonement for our sins; but he will in due time appear in the greatness of his strength. The vintage ripens apace; the day of vengeance, fixed and determined on, approaches apace; let sinners seek to be reconciled to their righteous Judge, ere he brings down their strength to the earth. Does Christ say, I come quickly? let our hearts reply, Even so, come; let the year of the redeemed come.”

LESSON BACKGROUND

We are certain that the scriptures in Psalms, Isaiah, and Revelation are describing the Messiah: His fury against sin, His vengeance for the adversary who sold them under sin, and His purpose and mission to redeem and save. Both passages from Isaiah mention looking for one to help and intercede; both mention the “arm” that brought salvation and the righteousness and fury that sustained and upheld him. That arm was Christ; He was the only one who could do what it took to bring salvation to fallen man.

What did it mean for Christ—coming as God in the flesh to accomplish the warfare against the adversary and bring deliverance to us—to put on righteousness as a breastplate and salvation as a helmet? Did He need—as we need—to have filthy garments stripped from Him and new, clean garments put on Him? Of course not. He was tempted in all points “as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15); he was made “to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (II Corinthians 5:21). “I do always those things that please him,” He testified in John 8:29. When He spoke to His disciples of the nearness of His death on the cross, He said, “The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me” (John 14:30).

In this particular sense, the prophet is speaking of the Divine vengeance toward sin, and the mission upon which He obligated Himself, to save, redeem, and make us righteous and just with God. Christ was sent, commissioned and equipped with a righteous indignation against sin, a vengeance toward His adversaries equal to His deep, arduous love for mankind, and an efficacious saving grace that would not only make unjust and unworthy sinners

justified before Him, but also save them from their sins and make their ways and doings righteous and godly. The metaphor is one of a mighty warrior, a hero, a champion, going to accomplish what needed to be done, who put on righteousness—His just quarrel with the foe; His retribution “double” for all of man’s sin—as armor, declaring Himself willing to be the substitute, mighty to save, and ready to deliver. Hallelujah! What a Savior!

There is also in these scriptures, no doubt, a looking ahead to the last day of judgment, when Christ “shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (I Corinthians 15:24-25).

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What was the “wonderment” in Isaiah 59:16 and 63:5, and who answered the need?
2. From the collection of verses, give a description of the Messiah; His person, His apparel, and the meaning of it.
3. What names were given to Him in the Revelation scene?
4. In the memory verse, what three things cause the triumph and majestic ride of the Messiah?
5. Against what is the fury and wrath of the Messiah directed?

LIFE APPLICATION

As I studied the scriptures for the lesson on the breastplate of righteousness, I began to get glimpses of this portrait of the Lord Jesus as the mighty warrior going forth to accomplish our salvation, and I knew we must devote a lesson to this wondrous truth. There are more details than we can describe or explain in the short time and space we are given here. This challenges us to much personal study—with joy and adoration.

There is a big picture before us here: the grand scheme laid out in all of Scripture of the fall of man and the plan of God to redeem. But there is also a precious comfort in applying the

glorious truth in a very personal way.

“Lord, I bow my life to Your great will and way! The arrows and sword of Your Word have pierced my heart, and I surrender. You are my substitute! You are the Lamb of God, slain for my sin. You were the only one who could appease the wrath of God against my sin. There is no other way of salvation. And I, in my rebellion and transgression of Your laws, joined my voice with the crucifixion mob and the weak followers who forsook You. Alone, You took my place! Yet, You girded yourself in righteousness and burning zeal to bring me cleansing, pardon, and deliverance from my sin. I cast myself at Your feet, broken and wounded. I plead for Your righteousness to cover me. Go forth into all of the kingdoms of my heart and slay every enemy. Bring to justice every high thing that exalts itself against You. Ride prosperously and establish truth in my inner being. Amen.”

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I wanted to send this testimony of my Daddy’s, with a heartfelt “Praise God!” You see, this is why I’m saved today. Yes, I’m young, and as my grandmother says, sometimes full of foolishness, but I do love the Lord with all my heart. Grandma also says I’m in God’s boot camp, but she’s not giving up on me, and I’m glad of that! Please pray for me.

My Testimony

By George Anthony

“It all started with a dream, a bad dream.

I had some bad dreams, but this particular dream was about a ‘being’ trying to take me. Pulling me.

Someone came along and pulled me out of the being’s control.

When I woke up, I began to pray to God and beg Him to forgive me for all my sins and wrongdoings.

I began to tell Him all the things I had done wrong. I continued to pray to God until at last I felt a weight was lifted.

I lift my hands in expression of the freedom I feel. I am happy. I believe God forgave me.

I know now that Jesus is the one in my dream that came and pulled me from the being's control. That being was the devil.

I have a new life. I used to want darkness, but now I have light.

Friends and family, don't cry for me, for I am at rest in Jesus Christ. Come to me one day in my mansion!

Amigos y la familia, usted no tanga mucho lagrimas para me. Yo estoy con Jesus Cristo. Viene a mi un dia en mi mansion de Dios."

—George Surita, Jr., AL

JANUARY 31, 2021

OUR BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with jewels.

Isaiah 64:6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as the leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Zechariah 3:3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel.

4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

Romans 5:17 For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. (Also Titus 3:5-6).

Romans 10:3 For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of

God. (Also Matthew 5:20).

4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

1 John 3:7 Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

MEMORY VERSE: Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness. —Ephesians 6:14

CENTRAL THOUGHT: To find out how we may exchange the filthy garments of our righteousness for the robe of His righteousness; and what it means for us to have on His righteousness as the breastplate of Christian armor.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 64:6 “Unclean”: polluted and defiled. “Righteousnesses”: our righteous deeds and acts. “Filthy rags”: polluted garments. “Our deeds, whatever they may seem to be, if we think to merit by them at God's hand, are as rags, and will not cover us; filthy rags, and will but defile us. Even our few good works...are so defective and defiled as done by us, that they need to be washed in the fountain open for sin and uncleanness” (Matthew Henry

Commentary).

Romans 10:4 “The end”: consummation. “[This root (tel-) means "reaching the end (aim)." It is well-illustrated with the old pirate's telescope, unfolding (extending out) one stage at a time to function at full-strength (capacity effectiveness)” (HELPS Word Studies).

LESSON BACKGROUND

The scriptures in Isaiah state two important truths: praise that God has covered us with His robe of righteousness and lament for the insufficiency and unworthiness of our own righteousness. We can go to the scene in the Garden of Eden for an illustration. When Adam and Eve had sinned, they immediately sensed their nakedness and sewed fig leaves together in an effort to cover themselves. Yet when they knew they were soon to face the Creator they hid, proof that the aprons they had made were not enough. Indeed, in the aftermath of their sin, God slew an animal and used its skins to make coats for them so they were truly covered.

The fig leaves represent our filthy rags. The coats show us how it is only God’s righteousness that can cover the shame of our condition. The passage from Zechariah 3 provides a further illustration of the filthy garments that must be exchanged for the robe of righteousness.

Romans 5 lets us know that God’s righteousness is a free gift, and it is given so we may reign over sin in this life. Romans 10 explains the dilemma again, and declares that Christ is the only effective, sufficient answer for sin. The entire book of Romans should be studied for its presentation of this subject!

In Philippians 3 Paul testified of his personal grapple with this dilemma, and how he solved it by throwing everything he had counted as personal gain or merit into the trash heap, and winning Christ, making Him and His righteousness his own.

In the letter to Titus, Paul explains the power of the grace of God, which not only brings pardon, but true deliverance from the power of sin. It is grace which enables an individual to do what he could not do before Christ—to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.

The scriptures certainly do not excuse sin, nor our weakness and insufficiency to overcome sin. John writes plainly that it is deception to believe that we can remain in unrighteousness.

So, we must put on Christ. We must be suited with what only He can give. As He wore righteousness to accomplish our salvation, so we must allow Him to cover our souls with it. His zeal and passion against sin becomes ours, and we too can ride prosperously with victory.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. From Isaiah 61:10 to Philippians 3:9, the verses in our lesson speak of God imparting to us His righteousness. How does He do this?
2. What actions on our part are necessary for God to impute His righteousness to us?
3. In Titus 2:11 and I John 3:7, it speaks of God not only imputing His righteousness to us but also transforming the heart and life. Describe this process.
4. What does putting on the breastplate of righteousness mean for us personally?
5. Connect the mission of Jesus, the mighty Warrior, with our mission, as His recruits.

LIFE APPLICATION

I'm very interested in the process by which God exchanges our filthy rags of what we feel are moral, righteous deeds, for His true righteousness. Why aren't our efforts good enough? Isn't it righteous that we have compassion on the starving in foreign, famine-stricken lands, the suffering, abused children, or the homeless dogs and cats? The simple answer is that a person may do all of these honorable deeds while yet having the stain of sin—a heart bent toward thinking its own thoughts, speaking its own words and having its own way—instead of a God-centered heart that is focused on God's thoughts, God's words and God's way. This renders all of the good, moral actions of a person still as filthy, because of the strain of self-centeredness remaining. It is necessary for God to change who we are, that we may be righteous, thereby producing truly righteous actions (Malachi 3:3).

God must "take the filthy garments" away from us. How does He do this? "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). We must "receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness" (Romans 5:17) and mercy (Titus 3:5-6) that he has freely given, and

“submit” ourselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:3). We must “believe” (Romans 10:4; 9-19) in Him (John 3:15-16), and openly “confess” our faith in Him (Romans 10:10; II Corinthians 4:13).

The saving grace which declares an unjust sinner “righteous” in God’s sight will begin to work the works of righteousness in the life and conduct. It will “teach” an individual to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12). The precious Holy Spirit will be given for the asking, empowering and strengthening us to walk in all God’s commands. The fruit of righteousness will be the standard by which our lives are known (Matthew 7:20; I John 3:7).

With that understanding, let us then gird on this bulletproof vest with the same ardor and vengeance against sin as our Lord and Savior (II Corinthians 10:4-6)! Christ’s righteousness imputed to us and producing in us positive, righteous fruits will be a safeguard as we proceed through a world full of corruption and lust.

The picture of Christ going forth conquering and to conquer, clad with the breastplate of righteousness, implies a zeal to help and rescue fallen mankind; therefore, let us not forget the focus of our mission: to seek and to save the lost. Put on the breastplate and ride into your office or workplace. Buckle it securely and tackle the task at school or university. Make sure you’re wearing it at the breakfast table and at the family reunion. You’re in the service of the mighty King of kings!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

A little while back I was faced with a situation that would cause me to either stand up for myself or back down in complete humility. I don't remember what was said, but for whatever reason I was left feeling insulted and offended. Immediately I wanted to stand my ground and say, "I'm right and you are the one at fault." You know the feeling.

When I got a chance to think everything over, I realized that undoubtedly I was in the wrong and what was said was definitely true.

After being honest with myself, I knew the next step would be letting go of my attitude. I wasn't very excited to do that, but I knew I wouldn't have peace until I did. So, letting go of self-will, I humbled myself yet again and crucified the attitude that had me bound.

I came out of the battle victorious with the lesson that the sooner you humble yourself and look the matter over honestly, the better and happier your life will be.

I thank God for this victory and the lesson I received from it.

—Tiffany Gellenbeck, KY

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

YOUR FEET SHOD (PART ONE)

Deuteronomy 33:25 Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

I Samuel 2:9 He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. (Also Proverbs 3:26).

Psalms 37:31 The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.

Psalms 91:11 For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

13 Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

Habakkuk 3:19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

Luke 10:19 Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Romans 16:20a And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

MEMORY VERSE: And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. — Ephesians 6:15

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's detailed, attentive care of the feet of his saints is well

documented by Old and New Testament writers, as shown in the literal example of the Israelites' forty-years'-tramp through the wilderness, but even more so in the figurative examples of His care of believers' footing on the spiritual journey, in spiritual warfare, and in spiritual danger.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Deuteronomy 33:25 "Shoes": meaning bolts or bars of gates, but translated by the King James Version as shoes. "These shoes suited his rocky coast from Carmel to Sidon. Country people as well as ancient warriors had their lower extremities protected by metallic greaves [heavy-soled hobnailed military sandal-boots] (1Samuel 17:6; Ephesians 6:15) and iron-soled shoes" (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary)

I Samuel 2:9 "Saints": those who are faithful and devoted to God's service; of kindly, godly character and piety; God's chosen ones.

Psalms 37:31 "Slide": slip from the path; falter.

Habakkuk 3:19: "Hinds' feet": denoting the agility of a deer.

Luke 10:19 "Power": authority. "Serpents and scorpions...": the spiritual powers of evil.

Romans 16:20 "Bruise": crush completely; shatter.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We have cited just a few of the many scriptures that refer to the protection God gives his chosen ones, covering even the detail of each footstep along the journey of life. The verse in Deuteronomy comes from Moses' prophetic blessing given to Israel just before his death. He blessed and directed each tribe personally. The reference to "shoes" was given to the tribe of Asher, to whom God also directed, "Let him dip his foot in oil," which alluded to "a land abounding in olives, and generally richly fertile, a fat land and yielding rich dainties, such as Jacob (Genesis 49:20) promised to Asher" (Pulpit Commentary). An interesting note, which I remember from a message by Bro. John Varghese of India, was that the prophetess Anna in Luke 2:36 was from the tribe of Asher, and the spiritual significance of the oil was that she was especially anointed—God directing her footsteps—to identify the infant Jesus in the

temple as the Messiah.

Hannah's song encourages us that God keeps the feet of His saints, and the psalmist promises that none of the steps of one who keeps God's law in his heart shall falter or slide. An extra protection is mentioned in Psalm 91—that of the angels bearing us up in their arms lest our feet stumble or are injured on our journey.

The remaining four verses in our lesson speak of treading on the powers of satan, or having the agility of a mountain deer to climb on very difficult, treacherous places. What precious promises are given to God's people!

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What was Hannah's promise about God's saints?
2. What keeps the steps from sliding in Psalm 37?
3. Who are commissioned to guard the feet of God's hidden ones?
4. Habakkuk used the analogy of the feet of a deer: upon what does God make us to walk, and what is the spiritual meaning?
5. List the different words used by the Psalmist, Jesus and Paul to describe the enemy upon which we may tread.

LIFE APPLICATION

Protecting the feet, or footsteps, of His saints. What a wonderful assurance, especially the part about Him employing the ministering angels to bear us up lest we injure ourselves! Spiritual foot protection was a pleasant surprise as I followed the line of verses through the Bible. The concept isn't strange to modern, everyday life, when you think about it. A sports player uses special cleated shoes for sure-footedness and running. A lineman could not go up the high poles without his special shoes. A farmer protects his feet against the wet weather and barnyard mess with heavy boots. A hiker certainly has the best hiking boots as part of his gear.

I'm just thankful for how my Commander lovingly guards every footstep. Surely, those special times when I don't know HOW I came through were because of those ministering angels bearing me up. When my feet were "tangled with briars, ready to cast me down"; when I was about to step in a land mine, and a voice said, "Stop!" When the serpent struck at my feet, and my gear stopped him. I'm speaking spiritually, now. But these are real battles, and real-life situations. They happen in teenage struggles, in marriage, in raising children, in old age. The enemy tries to get us to stumble. Disappointment in people, sickness that never seems to let up, life-changes. He will keep the feet of His saints.

I'm eager for the next lesson to explain just WHAT God uses to protect my feet, and how I'm to put it on.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The past week I've been fighting battles and struggling with trying to figure out where my victory lay. However, without realizing it, I was searching for the capability within myself.

Finally, one morning as I was going about my day, I was praying and asking God what more I had to do. I had been faithful in my devotions, done my duties, and gave time to Him, yet I felt incredibly overwhelmed and frustrated that I was somehow coming short. In the midst of that He spoke to me, simply saying "Humble yourself and surrender it all to Jesus."

I almost didn't believe it could be so simple. In a way I felt like I had to prove myself, like I had to do some great big thing to be able to find my peace again. However, as I continued to pray and seek God, He made it clear to me that surrender was the answer.

When I got down and prayed, I was able to humble myself before God and give all my feelings, questions, and shortcomings to Him. The discouragement I had been feeling disappeared as I realized that even if I couldn't, God could. I had found my victory, my peace, and my joy again.

Sometimes we can try to fight battles God never even meant for us to fight, or perhaps the battle will go on for days, and even weeks, just because we won't give it all over to Him.

Many times without realizing it, I try to overcome within my own strength. I may be saying "God, why am I not winning this?" or "Why are you not fixing it for me?" but how could He ever fix something that He doesn't have full control over?

Only when I would realize that I wasn't capable in myself to win and I gave it all to the Lord was I able to truly have victory over that area.

God wants to fight the battle for us. He wants to be our refuge and source of our strength. You don't have to find it within yourself. I've wasted a lot of time thinking it was complicated, but in reality it's very simple.

If you're facing any troubles, I want to encourage you to sweetly surrender and talk to Jesus about it. He always wants to hear from an earnest heart. He will be faithful to show you the way and give you complete victory.

The answer to so many of our problems lies in giving them over to Jesus. He wants to bear all of your burdens. As Christians we have such a wonderful privilege. We have the opportunity to give every trouble to Someone who can take care of it for us, Someone who can work every situation for our benefit. How wonderful is that?

Take advantage of the opportunity. Humble yourself, and surrender. Then you will find peace in your soul and a power that goes beyond human strength. "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:6-7).

—Emily Doolittle, OK

FEBRUARY 14, 2021

YOUR FEET SHOD (PART TWO)

Ephesians 6:15 And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

I Peter 3:15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

16 Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

II Timothy 2:21 If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Isaiah 40:9 O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Isaiah 52:7 How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!

MEMORY VERSE: The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn. —Isaiah 61:1-2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The protection God gives His people for their feet is effective because they have fastened on the preparedness of the gospel of peace; they are cleansed, anointed, and ready to share the good tidings of the powerful gospel.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ephesians 6:15 “Preparation”: an outward standing ready or an inward being ready; preparedness; the “condition of a person or thing prepared with the promptitude which the gospel produces” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon). “Shod”: to bind under; be fitted. “Peace”: “the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon).

I Peter 3:15 “Sanctify”: set apart as holy and mighty; to hallow; to revere; to “recognize His full holiness and treat him with due awe” (Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers). “Answer”: apologia (Greek); an apology, not in the modern sense of an excuse, but in a legal sense of a well-reasoned, thought-out defense that presents evidence or proof. “Reason”: literally, “a collecting”; an account or explanation in reference to judgment. “With meekness and fear:” with gentleness and respect.

II Timothy 2:21 “Meet”: easily used; profitable.

Romans 1:16 “Gospel”: good tidings; “the good news which relates to the Messiah, to his character, advent, preaching, death, resurrection, and ascension” (Barnes’ Notes on the Bible). “Power”: miraculous might; strength; ability to perform.

Isaiah 40:9; 52:7; 61:1 “That bringest good tidings”: cheering with good tidings; announcing good news; bearing joyful intelligence.

winds. “He looked”: to look eagerly and wait patiently. “Wild grapes”: not the domestic or cultivated kind.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson contains the concept of the soldier’s feet being protected by gear which enables him to be sure-footed on treacherous ground, tread without fear on venomous creatures, and plunge forward in attack with flying missiles all around. The soldier is to bind or fit this protection on his feet and legs.

The first part of the fitting process is preparedness of heart and mind. The conscience is to be “good”—or free from the encumbrance of sin—and the conduct irreproachable. Believing the gospel or good news of salvation accomplishes this. There is a tranquility and peace attained through faith in Christ and His Word like no other; certainly “not as the world giveth.” Paul’s second letter to Timothy speaks of being “purged”—from subversive words of no profit, profane and vain babblings, error and iniquity (II Timothy 2:14, 16, 18 and 19)—and sanctified—dedicated, set apart, and made holy.

The gospel of peace is a powerful agent. It accomplishes salvation, or justification with God, and reveals the righteousness of God to mankind. The prophecy from Isaiah 52 speaks of the beauty of the feet of the messenger who preaches the gospel of peace. Whether or not the apostle had this prophecy in mind when he speaks about the preparation of the gospel of peace being the footgear of the Christian warrior, it is clear from Scripture that there is a unique protection in the rigors of battle specific to the preparedness of a heart which believes and proclaims the gospel; a heart that has been purged and made holy, and keeps a good conscience; a life that is solely for God’s honor; who is easily used by God and always prepared to be profitable and do a good deed.

The basis for all of this is the action of “sanctifying” the Lord God in our hearts (I Peter

3:15). This passage is a quote from Isaiah 8:13, “Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.” Moses, when provoked to anger by Israel at the waters of Meribah, made a grievous error because he failed to sanctify the LORD of hosts (Numbers 20:12). What exactly did that mean? Moses failed, in this instance, to set the Lord apart exclusively as holy and almighty and instead made the situation all about himself and Aaron. “Must we fetch you water...?” The action of keeping the Lord in His rightful place in all of our thoughts, dealings and actions; of honoring and reverencing Him as Lord of all, King of kings, the Holy One, the Almighty God; will cause us to put the enemy in his rightful place; people in their correct position, and most definitely ourselves in proper alignment. See then, how that puts the soldier in a readiness to combat anything, answer any charge, accomplish any mission? He is then equipped to give “an answer” of the “words of truth” (Proverbs 22:21), speech “with grace, seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6), and a “word in season” (Isaiah 50:4).

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The “preparation” in I Peter 3:15-16 includes the command to _____ the Lord God in your hearts, have a good _____, and good _____.
2. The “preparation” in II Timothy 2:21 is that a man must _____ himself, be a vessel unto _____, _____, and _____ for the _____’s _____.
3. The gospel of Christ is the _____ of _____ unto _____.
4. Which prophecy in Isaiah mentions “feet”?
5. What are the elements of the “good tidings” in Isaiah 61:1 and 2?

LIFE APPLICATION

What an awesome challenge in one little phrase! “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” I want to know how to properly equip my feet for combat and the forward march across dangerous terrain.

It’s really all about how BIG God is in my mind. I can see this in David’s mind as he faced

Goliath. Gideon, as he gathered the little group of 300 and circled the Midianite camp. Asa, as he faced a million warriors with an army a little over half that size. Elijah, as he stood at the Jordan. Peter, on Herod's death row. They were totally convinced their God was able! With this preparation we can scale mountains as if they were flat ground. We can tread on the spiritual adder and scorpion and all the power the enemy brings against us.

These are the good tidings we bring to all of our situations. My God reigns! He is able! He delivers from sin, He heals disease, He breaks all addictions. "He keepeth the feet of His saints."

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

Wow, what an amazing promise! I found throughout life there are many things that I could worry about if I allow myself, but I also know God's great promise of peace to me!

In the past, I chose to worry about things too much. No matter how big or small the issue, I would just fret about it. It came to the point that when an issue would come up, I would let it steal my peace. I would dwell on it, trying to figure out what to do. I was definitely thinking and worrying about it too much. Unfortunately, being human, there seem to be things to get concerned over everywhere I look, and the devil loves it. He knows that if he can get me to worry over something, (which he's very good at) then I'm getting farther from God and His purpose for me.

Thankfully, God helped me recognize my lack of faith in Him and how I allowed worry to slip into my life. In Ephesians it says, "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." The word wiles in this verse stood out to me. It basically means something manipulative or cunning which is used to persuade someone. It made me realize that one of the wiles of the devil is to cause worry, and that I need to be on my guard. I'm so thankful for God showing me this area in my life which was a hindrance in my walk with Him! My desire is to have the whole armor of God on at ALL times, in order to withstand whatever the devil sends my way.

—Colton Purvis, LA

FEBRUARY 21, 2021

THE SHIELD OF FAITH (PART ONE)

Ephesians 6:16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Romans 4:19 And being not weak in faith, he [Abraham] considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Romans 8:38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

II Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair;

9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.

Hebrews 11:13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

MEMORY VERSE: We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

—II Corinthians 4:13-14

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The faith which serves the Christian warrior as a full body shield is the same persuasion and assurance of Abraham and other Old Testament saints and Paul and the saints of the New Testament; the basis of which is the resurrection of our Lord.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ephesians 6:16 “Above all”: in addition to all things. Another meaning would be against all things or on all occasions or circumstances. “Shield”: heavy, oblong Roman shield. “That word is connected with the Greek word meaning ‘door,’ and gives a rough notion of the look of the instrument of defence—a great rectangular oblong, behind which a man could stand untouched and untouchable” (MacLaren’s Expositions).

Romans 4:20 “Staggered”: to separate, distinguish or decide (positive); or to over-judge; vacillate; waver (negative). “Faith”: conviction of the truth of anything; come to trust; be persuaded; guarantee; warrant; fully reveal.

Romans 4:21 “Fully persuaded”: accomplished; to carry out fully; fully convinced; to fully satisfy.

Romans 8:38 and Hebrews 11:13: “Persuaded”: from a root meaning to bind; to induce to believe; to convince; to have confidence; the root word of faith in the Greek.

II Corinthians 4:13 “I believed”: to think to be true; to be persuaded; credit. “The conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon).

LESSON BACKGROUND

To understand the concept of faith becoming a shield for us, we must comprehend what is the meaning of faith and search for an example in Scripture from which we can learn. We immediately think of Abraham, called the Father of the Faithful, to whom God said, “Fear not...I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” (Genesis 15:1). Both in the book of Romans and in Galatians the apostle addresses the truth that believers in Christ are Abraham’s spiritual (not flesh-and-blood) seed and heirs. As his sons and daughters, we too

have God's righteousness imputed to us by faith. We have, as our memory verse declares, the same spirit of faith as the ancient saints who triumphed by their faith in God. Paul describes that kind of victory in Romans 8 and II Corinthians 4. In Hebrews 11 he describes the particular elements of their faith: they "saw" the promises, were persuaded of them, embraced them, and adjusted their world view around what they saw.

What did those saints see, and of what were they convinced? They saw a Redeemer whose power would deliver from sin and give them an eternal kingdom and inheritance. The promise had been given to Adam and Eve, and the belief of that promise impelled the patriarchs to build altars and offer sacrifices on them as proof of their faith in the coming Lamb of God. They saw the unseen God, were convinced of His faithfulness and holiness, and in spite of pagan opposition, they kept themselves separate from the idolatry and lived righteous lives.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. List the seven characteristics or steps of Abraham's faith and its result.
2. How does our faith connect us with Abraham?
3. Name the ten elements of Paul's persuasion as described in Romans 8.
4. Name the four elements of the faith of the saints as described in II Corinthians 4.
5. What assurance or proof given by God gives us the same spirit of faith as the victorious host of the Old Testament?

LIFE APPLICATION

Paul reasoned that as believers looking back at the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the New Testament saints have the same spirit of faith as those who went before them who looked forward to, but never saw the Lord. Their persuasion gives them courage and confidence in the middle of their troubles, distresses and persecutions. They refuse to be moved by the temporal things of this world, but keep their eyes on the unseen eternal realities.

When Paul visited Mars Hill in Athens, he offered this to the crowd of worshippers he saw there: the “unknown” God they ignorantly worshiped was the Creator of the world. Paul likened God to a Heavenly parent, not far from any one of them, and they should seek Him and repent, because He had appointed a day in which He would judge the world. God had offered proof or assurance of this important fact unto all men, “in that he hath raised him [Jesus] from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

It’s by faith—that conviction, persuasion, proof and assurance given by God—in Jesus’ resurrection that we live in victory today, and it is that faith which shields us from every fiery dart of the wicked.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

There is a clear reason why the Lord, through the Apostle Paul, told us to put on the whole armor of God and it is because we have an adversary, the devil. We are to have the shield of faith, a knowledge that we are His, to protect from the darts which Satan may throw at us. In December of 2019 I had to take a lie detector test for a job. After telling the tester I was a Christian, I failed the test miserably. I can still see him looking over the computer with a scowl on his face as I tried to assert that there had been a mistake. So, he obliged and retested me on the questions I failed; upon which, I failed again.

As I left, I felt the piercing judgment from the tester, and I felt the enemy get in the car with me. I called someone for prayer and really it turned into me complaining about God. “If the Lord didn’t want me to have the job, He could’ve just told me. He didn’t have to embarrass me like that!” was the attitude I had. The enemy saw the perfect inroad to accuse God to me. Why not? I gave Him the ammo with my attitude. He brought to mind the possibility of jail time because the questions were just that horrific. I cried and prayed for myself for the hour-long ride home. The Lord brought to mind that I had let my shield down and Satan was able to wound me. Days of praying went by and I felt so very ashamed for allowing the enemy to accuse the Lord to me.

I had a few confidantes who knew the situation. I told them it was in the Lord’s hands. I submitted to not having the job and went on to forget about it. Since that time, the necessary background check proved my record clear of all possible doubts and the Lord has blessed me

to complete the job hiring process.

Do not drop your shield of faith! The enemy is right there waiting and watching for the precise moment that he can take his shot at you. If the enemy is talking, always remember he has your worst interest at heart!

—Damar Randle, CA

FEBRUARY 28, 2021

THE SHIELD OF FAITH (PART TWO)

Deuteronomy 33:29 Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

Isaiah 41:11 Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.

Isaiah 54:17 No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD.

Romans 8:37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Ephesians 6:16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

I John 5:4 For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (Also I John 4:4).

Revelation 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

11 And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their

testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

MEMORY VERSE: Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. —Proverbs 30:5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Faith in the power of God, sealing that faith with our lives and testimony, and putting our trust in Him, is a mighty shield for us, causing us to overcome the world and cast down the accuser with a victory that makes us to tread upon all his high places as more than conquerors; to quench all of his fiery darts; to cause our opposers to be ashamed, condemned, to perish and not prosper.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Deuteronomy 33:29 “Shield”: shield or buckler carried by a warrior for defense; same word as for “scales” in the description of leviathan in Job 41:15. “Tread”: trample (Berean Study Bible).

Romans 8:37 “More than conquerors”: from the Greek word “hupernikao,” or hyper (beyond) plus nikao (conquer), meaning exceedingly conquer; completely and overwhelmingly victorious; surpassing victory. “The ‘more than conquerors’ seems to mean, if there is any definite idea to be attached to it, the conversion of the enemy conquered into a friend and a helper” (MacLaren’s Expositions).

Ephesians 6:16 “Shall be able”: from the Greek word dunamai (from which we get our English word dynamite!); to have power; it means literally, “I can.” “Quench”: extinguish. “Fiery”: flaming; ignited. “Darts”: missile; arrow; javelin. Translated “needle” in Luke 18:25. “The wicked”: bringing toils, annoyances, perils; speaking primarily of the devil, the evil one.

I John 5:4 “Overcometh”: prevail; subdue; carry off the victory; come off victorious.

Revelation 12:10 “Accuser”: make accusation; charge; prosecute. “Cast down”: to throw to the ground, prostrate and passive.

Revelation 12:11 “Testimony”: witness; with the meaning, “to hold the testimony and to persevere steadfastly in bearing it” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon).

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the previous lesson, we concentrated on the faith that is the door-sized defense or shield for the Christian soldier; today we want to focus on the exciting concept of the kind of victory faith in God gives us. God promised Abraham He was his shield; and we can remember the ways God defended Abraham against his enemies, time after time. Well, that promise extended to Abraham's descendants, the nation of Israel. The promise from Deuteronomy is an exclamation—"How happy!"—that celebrates the victory God gives Israel. It repeats a thought from the lesson about saints' feet—the ability God gives His people to tread over their enemies. The prophet Isaiah enlarges on this: the enemies of God's people would be ashamed and confounded; they would be reduced to nothing; they would perish. Their weapons would not prosper. You get the idea of the flaming dart just fizzling out.

"The fiery darts of the wicked...or devil, are evil thoughts, and strong injections, as they are termed, which in the unregenerate inflame the passions, and excite the soul to acts of transgression. While the faith is strong in Christ it acts as a shield to quench these. He who walks so as to feel the witness of God's Spirit that he is his child, has all evil thoughts in abhorrence; and, though they pass through his mind, they never fix in his passions. They are caught on this shield, blunted, and extinguished" (Clarke's Commentary).

Paul in Romans 8 expands the idea, rejoicing that the saints are more than conquerors; that we have the dynamic power through faith in Christ to extinguish Satan's darts (Ephesians 6:16); and John declares that the faith God births in us overcomes the world! In John's vision on the Isle of Patmos, he saw the great conflict in the heavenly realm and heard the triumphant voice, "They overcame him..." The great accuser is cast down!

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Express the terms of victory found in Deuteronomy 33, Isaiah 41 and 54, Romans 8, Ephesians 6, I John 5, and Revelations 12.
2. The word "heritage" refers us back to the promise God gave to _____.
3. The word "shield" was also used in Scripture to describe the physical "armor" of what beast?

4. Share the meaning of the term, “more than conquerors.”
5. In the Memory Verse, what is the key to God being a shield to us?

LIFE APPLICATION

The victory described by these verses is the “heritage” promised to Abraham! Zacharias was inspired after his son John’s birth with this praise about the promise to Abraham, that “we, being delivered out of the hands of our enemies might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life” (Luke 1:74-75). We receive this heritage because our faith in Christ makes us sons and heirs of Abraham.

The MacLaren quote in the Word Definitions is inspiring; however, while we know Christ gives us total and complete victory over the devil, the Bible tells us he will be completely banished into the lake of fire in the end. He’s not going to be converted or turn into a friend. But consider the opposition we may sometimes have because of our faith. Being more than a conqueror in this sense brings to mind the many times in history when the foes of the church were won to Christ and actually became friends and helpers, as in the example of Paul the apostle. I believe everything satan brings against us can be turned into spiritual good if we hold our trust in Christ. That is overwhelming victory!

Jesus said, “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Then He gave an admonition, “Rejoice not that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:18-20). This balances the celebration of the overwhelming victory we have with the truth that only as we trust in Christ for salvation, and have Him write our names in His book of life, can we have that kind of victory. It is His righteousness. It is through His strength. HE is our shield. We take refuge behind this huge shield only by faith in His name.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

It all started on July 27, 2020. We came back from the Monark campmeeting. It had been just beautiful. I really enjoyed myself; my whole family did. We met family that we had

known nothing about, yet they were very welcoming.

My baby sister, Faith, started coughing badly, but we thought nothing of it until the first Sunday morning after we got back and my grandmother came in as usual to wake us up for church services in our home. I asked, “Are we going to church this morning?” She said, “No.” I knew something was wrong. We were being quarantined because we had symptoms of the COVID-19 virus.

At first it was kind of fun, and then it became boring. It was then that I invited my sister into my room. We drew pictures together and talked and talked about things. Over time we got better and we began to think and talk like each other. We got really close. Just to think of her being sick or to hear her cough hurt me. She no longer got on my nerves! I just wanted my baby sister healed, and I prayed hard for her to get well.

The Lord heard our prayers, and she was healed; both of us were healed, and we found out it was not even the COVID-19 virus at all. Today if you ask me a question and Faith is around, most of the time we will answer the same way; it’s as though she can read my thoughts now. Through the sickness and being “locked in” together, we learned to love each other and we have grown very close. Please continue to pray for us to live for the Lord.

—Sarai Castro, AL

MARCH 7, 2021

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

Psalm 140:7 O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle.

Isaiah 59:17 For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke.

Ephesians 6:17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

I Thessalonians 5:8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

MEMORY VERSE: Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. —I Peter 1:13

CENTRAL THOUGHT: “The hope of conquering every adversary and surmounting every difficulty, through the blood of the Lamb, is as a helmet that protects the head; an impenetrable one, that the blow of the battle-axe cannot cleave. The hope of continual safety and protection, built on the promises of God, to which the upright follower of Christ feels he has a Divine right, protects the understanding from being darkened, and the judgment from being confused by any temptations of Satan, or subtle arguments of the sophistical ungodly. He who carries Christ in his heart cannot be cheated out of the hope of his heaven” (Clarke’s Commentary).

WORD DEFINITIONS

Psalm 140:7 “Covered”: overshadowed; screened.

Isaiah 59:17 “Helmet”: from a root meaning high; rounded, as an arch; turban.

“Salvation”: salvation from God, primarily from external evils; often with an added spiritual idea (Brown-Driver-Briggs).

Ephesians 6:17 “Helmet”: encirclement of the head. “The glorious truth that we are saved...will keep us from intellectual surrender and rationalistic doubt” (Pulpit Commentary).

I Thessalonians 5:8 “Hope”: anticipate; welcome; expectation of what is sure.

“Salvation”: from a word that means to save or rescue; deliverance. “Hope of salvation is of great use to a Christian many ways: it is a cordial to comfort him, a spur to quicken him, a staff to support him, a bridle to restrain him, and so also a helmet to defend him: and therefore no wonder that the apostle calls true hope a lively hope” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary).

I Peter 1:13 “Hope to the end”: “perfectly, with a full, unwavering, constant hope” (Pulpit Commentary).

LESSON BACKGROUND

David’s prayer in Psalm 140 was written when he was fleeing from Saul and had encountered Doeg, an Edomite, Saul’s servant and chief herdsman, at the tabernacle at Nob. Ahimelech, the priest, had given David some of the hallowed bread to sustain him and his men; he had also given him the sword of Goliath at David’s hurried request for a weapon. The sad part of this was that David had explained his presence there deceptively, so that the priest did not know he was fleeing from Saul. Doeg reported David’s presence to the king, who falsely accused the priest of conspiracy and had Doeg kill eighty-five priests, along with the men, women, children, babies and livestock in the entire city of Nob. What a tragic loss as a result of a king mad with envy against a fugitive future king desperate to save his life! David no doubt mourned his part in putting the priests in jeopardy, while recognizing his real safety was from God. The part of verse seven that adds understanding to our study today is, “Thou hast covered my head...” As we have noted before about the armor of God, when we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” we are putting on a helmet, shield, breastplate and all. He is salvation!

We are citing again the verse from Isaiah about the Messiah. He put on a breastplate of righteousness and a helmet of salvation; a metaphor which portrays His righteous justice against sin and his righteous purpose to accomplish salvation for mankind.

Paul’s epistle to the Thessalonians echoes his message about the panoply to the Ephesians. There is a small difference in wording, but when you compare and combine the terms in these two books, the result is a more full and well-rounded understanding. The context of both I Thessalonians 5:8 and I Peter 1:13 gives us the idea not only of salvation as justification from sins through Christ, but that of future deliverance and eternal salvation to be revealed at His second coming.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. Psalm 140 was written after what discouraging time in David’s life?

2. Express how David was protected by God in his times of battle and physical danger.
3. Share the meaning of the wearing of the breastplate and helmet by the Messiah.
4. What are the term differences between Ephesians 6:17 and I Thessalonians 5:8, and how do they combine to give a complete meaning?
5. How does the “hope” expressed in I Thessalonians 5:8 and I Peter 3:13 provide protection to the Christian soldier?

LIFE APPLICATION

As the girdle of truth stabilizes the emotions and affections of a person, in the same way the helmet protects the rationale, the intellect, the mind. God kept David from giving way to despair; he covered his head in the times of battle. The salvation or deliverance God gives today—as Paul puts it in II Corinthians 1:10, He “delivered us [past tense] from so great a death, and doth deliver [present tense], in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us [future tense]”—and what we expect Him to do for us in the days ahead gives us such hope and keeps us from losing our grip on sanity. It protects us from satan’s insidious attacks on our minds.

I remember hearing, as a child, a recorded message by Bro. Louis Williams, on the importance of knowing you are saved. “If you say, ‘I think I’m saved’, you just give the devil a stick to crack your head with!” It’s so important to seek God with all your heart until you know you have touched Him and He has saved you from your sins. It’s equally important to seek Him for the infilling of His Spirit, and tarry there until He has quenched your heart’s deep thirst. The unquestioned knowledge that He is your Savior will keep your heart and your mind when doubts assail and you can’t see or feel His presence.

I’m so thankful for the added expression in I Thessalonians: “the hope of salvation.” Where would we be without hope? The “expectation of what is sure.” The certainty that when we pray, God is hearing. That our trials will have an end. Hope sweetly sings in times of trouble: “It is better farther on.”

“Farther on, but how much farther? Count the milestones one by one.

No, no counting—only trusting! It is better farther on.”

REFLECTIONS

In the fall of 2017, I was having some real trouble being under bondage to the devil for one thing or another. Being an overly conscientious person, I have struggled much with things like this and this time was one of the worst. I was under so much bondage that I didn't even think I could turn around in a gas station parking lot without stopping to buy something from them! I reasoned that it was costing them money by putting wear on their pavement.

I knew I was doing things I had never heard of other balanced Christians doing, but I still had these "feelings" that I was not being honest or that I would not be pleasing God if I didn't follow them. Trying to decide whether it was the Lord or not, and being afraid of displeasing Him, I would lose much peace in my mind over it, and many times end up giving into the feeling after long deliberation.

One thing that stands out to me is that even though I often did those things, it rarely brought true peace to me. It usually left me dissatisfied and still wondering if I should have done it or not.

I asked for counsel several times and took many notes, but though I received good counsel, it didn't give me all I needed to overcome it.

One day as I was driving, I was clearly impressed with this thought: Until I understood better how to discern the voice of the Lord, I should ignore the thoughts if I couldn't clearly tell who they came from. It made so much sense, I committed to trying it for a short time. It worked so well that I kept using that principle, and still use it sometimes.

That was definitely the turning point in my struggle with being in bondage. I am so thankful that Jesus came to set us free, not to give us more bondage. I would much rather be in servitude to God than to any of the enemy's vices.

"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

—Darren Gellenbeck, KY

MARCH 14, 2021

THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Psalm 45:3 Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty.

Isaiah 30:30 And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall shew the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones.

31 For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, which smote with a rod. (Also Isaiah 66:16).

Ezekiel 12:25 For I am the LORD: I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged: for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD.

Joel 2:11 And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

MEMORY VERSE: And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. —Ephesians 6:17

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God's word—His voice, His command, His law, His gospel—is the powerful weapon the Holy Spirit uses to execute His judgments; to discern the heart's thoughts and intents, to perform and accomplish His will and to smite and have dominion over the nations of men who oppose Him. We are commanded to take it and through the Holy Spirit use it against the adversary.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Isaiah 30:30 “Lighting down”: a phrase “taken from the gesture of a man who is about to smite another, who first lifts up his hand, and then lets it fall with great force upon him whom he designs to strike” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary).

Hebrews 4:12 “Quick”: living; with vital power; active; not lifeless or dead. “Powerful”: at work; full of energy; energized; effective; mighty in operation. “Piercing”: penetrating; coming through, so as to divide. “Soul”: the sphere of that life which makes a man carnal, or unspiritual; he possesses this element of life (anima) in common with the beasts (Cambridge Bible For Schools and Colleges; Barnes’ Notes on the Bible). “Spirit”: the immaterial and immortal part. “Joints and marrow”: figurative of the innermost recesses of our spiritual being. “Discerner of the thoughts”: capable of judging the purposes, mind and feelings. “Intents”: the intellect. “It discovers the most inward, close, secret, and constant motions, both speculative and practical, of the soul of man inseparably united to the heart; and one with another, whether they are opinions, conceptions, resolutions, or decrees, so subtle and so secret, as who can know them, but he who made the heart?” (Matthew Poole’s Commentary). “Is a critic of the propensities and suggestions of the heart” (Clarke’s Commentary).

Hebrews 4:13 “Manifest”: to become clear; to bring to light. “Naked and opened”: uncovered and laid bare. “With whom we have to do”: to whom we must give an account.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Today’s lesson takes us again to the inspiring scene of Christ, the mighty warrior, going forth conquering and accomplishing redemption and salvation. It is a familiar Old Testament picture. David paints the scene in Psalm 45, and speaks of Christ girding on his sword. Isaiah writes of it in chapters 30, 49, and 66. In the prophetic announcement in Isaiah 49, the Messiah proclaims “He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword.” We have also mentioned passages describing the power of the voice or word of the Lord from Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel. When we combine these descriptions with the New Testament vision in Revelation, of Christ with the sharp, two-edged sword coming out of His mouth, and that “with it he should smite

the nations” (Revelation 1:16; 2:12 and 16; 19:15), we rejoice with the truth of Him leading His army with the shout of triumph and His powerful Word.

The passage from Hebrews speaks of the power of God’s word to penetrate the innermost recesses of the heart, and to discern the thoughts and intents there. In the heart is where the real battle takes place; here is where He smites and rules the nations (Revelation 19:15); and as Isaiah 42:3 says, here is where He brings forth judgment unto truth (victory in Matthew 12:20).

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. The sword is the _____ of _____.
2. The Word is _____ and _____.
3. The Word is _____ than any _____.
4. The sword is administered by the _____.
5. The Word penetrates _____ and _____, _____ and _____, and is a discerner of the _____ and _____ of the heart.

LIFE APPLICATION

The entertainment world offers the thrill of imaginary “superheroes” who defend and rescue the helpless and blow up buildings and capture villains. But there has never been a superhero like Christ, with eyes gleaming fire and a two-edged sword coming from His mouth. The sword is His living, powerful gospel sent forth to the nations, executing judgment upon sin, discerning the hidden evils of every heart, and righteously making war against unclean spirits, false religion, and every stronghold of the enemy in the hearts of mankind.

The admonition of this lesson is: YOU take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God! But what does that mean? As we have learned, the battle wages inside the heart. We need the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, so that He may apply the sword of God’s Word to every impression, idea, emotion, temptation, intellectual notion, philosophy, or doctrine we may

imagine or encounter. Jesus said the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. He will help us know how to pray. He will give gifts of discernment.

We also need to know how to rightly divide the Word of truth as we administer the gospel sword to the world around us. In this passage it is described as a surgical tool. When we're dealing with something as valuable and delicate as a human soul, we need to use utmost care and precision.

In other applications it serves as a machete chopping down the forest, clearing the way for progress. It valiantly engages the heart's enemies, as described by John Bunyan in the scene in Pilgrim's Progress where Valiant-for-Truth fought his enemy : "I fought till my sword did cleave to my hand; and when they were joined together, as if a sword grew out of my arm, and when the blood ran through my fingers, then I fought with most courage."

God, give us courage to take Your mighty sword, and give us wisdom to know how to use it!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I remember a time when I was dealing with a spirit of infirmity. It had its grip upon me to the point where I was not sleeping well, I was barely eating, and it was robbing me of my peace. I remembered praying and praying but only getting temporary relief.

One Wednesday night, while at prayer service, a sister requested me to sing "On the Winning Side with Jesus." A verse of the song says, "The battle may be long and hard to win, and satan's host may press me sore; but though I may be tried, I'm on the winning side, I shall triumph ever more." I sang that song for her, not knowing it was what I needed to hear.

That song gave me strength and courage. The next time the spirit of infirmity came against me, I applied the Word of God, and immediately I was set free. The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, broke the power that the spirit of infirmity had over me.

—Audrey Whittaker, TX

MARCH 21, 2021

THE WEAPON OF PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;

19 And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

20 For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Philippians 1:12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Colossians 4:2 Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving;

3 Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.

I Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

MEMORY VERSE: Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that he may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. —James

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The apostles admonished the church to pray continuously—for the gospel ministers and the spread of the gospel message, for all who were in the bonds of affliction, for those in authority, and for the healing and spiritual prosperity of one another.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Ephesians 6:18 “Prayer”: exchange of wishes; especially addressed to God. “Literally, to interact with the Lord by switching human wishes (ideas) for His wishes as He imparts faith (“divine persuasion”) (HELPS Word Studies). Prayer is “the offering of the emotions and desires of the soul to God, in the name and through the mediation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is the communion of the heart with God through the aid of the Holy Spirit, and is to the Christian the very life of the soul” (ATS Bible Dictionary). It is “converse with God; the intercourse of the soul with God, not in contemplation or meditation, but in direct address to him” (Easton’s Bible Dictionary). “Supplication”: heart-felt petition arising out of a deep sense of urgent, personal need, want, or lack (HELPS Word Studies).

Ephesians 6:19 “Utterance”: an expression of a thought; a saying; a word as the embodiment of an idea; reasoning expressed by words (HELPS Word Studies). A computation, especially the Divine expression. “Mystery”: a secret, yet not something unknowable; “rather, it is what can only be known because God reveals it” (HELPS Word Studies).

Philippians 1:12 “Furtherance”: from the Greek word pro which means "in front of" and kóptō, "cut, chop down"; properly, advance (progress)—literally, "advancement by chopping down whatever impedes progress" (HELPS Word Studies).

Philippians 4:6 “Careful for nothing”: be over-anxious about nothing. “Never worry about anything” (International Standard Version).

Colossians 4:2 “Continue in prayer”: devote yourself; persist; to continue with intense effort; show steadfast strength.

I Timothy 2:1 “Intercession”: intervention which hits the mark; “Biblical intercession centers in waiting upon the Lord to learn what hits the mark (is His will) – i.e. guiding the believer to act as His agent” (HELPS Word Studies).

James 5:16 “Effectual”: engaged; at work; energized. “Avaieth”: to be able; to prevail.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The daily, close communion Adam and Eve had in the garden with their Creator Father was sadly interrupted by their sin. Later, we notice that worship of God involved the offering of sacrifices; then, after Cain’s murder of Abel, in the record of his life from that time, there seemed to be no communion with God until Adam’s later son, Seth, had a son, Enos. At that point, the scripture brings out that men began “to call upon the name of the Lord.” Later patriarchs who chose to believe and call on God continued to offer sacrifices along with their worship: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Job. The simple worship of the times usually involved thanksgiving for God’s blessings and acknowledgement of His mercy, invocation for God’s blessings on their everyday lives, self-dedication, and prayers for future blessings.

With the giving of the law, more ritual came into the experience of prayer: there were set times of prayer, and priests assumed the role of giving the sacrifices to God. Yet seekers who believed still voluntarily offered themselves to God in worship and consecration, as David, Jabez, Solomon, Nehemiah, and Daniel. These pious worshippers usually had three set times of prayer every day. The prophets called upon God in Israel’s troubled times, and God answered with messages of judgment or comfort and deliverance.

As far as set forms or positions of the body for praying, several kinds of acceptable prayers were recorded: when persons were standing, kneeling, lying prostrate on the ground, bowing, or spreading out their hands to God. Jesus introduced a pattern or model of acceptable prayer to the Heavenly Father, rather than a set form of prayer.

The advent of the Holy Spirit brought a new dimension to the soul crying out to God. The Spirit takes a believer’s weak effort and teaches him how to align his spirit with the will of God. The work of the gospel, as Paul stated many times, depended upon prayer, because it was the work of the Holy Spirit in the earth. As the Spirit moved, so men and women prayed and moved. As the Spirit gave utterance, so men and women spoke. The scriptures in today’s lesson teach the different admonitions the apostles gave the church concerning prayer. We are to pray in the Spirit. We are to pray for the gospel minister that the Word of God may be preached boldly and in all places. We are to pray for those suffering affliction or the bondage of prison. We are to pray for kings and all who are in authority—presidents, governors, judges, lawmakers, law enforcement officers, councilmen, board members, mayors. We are to

pray for each other that we may be healed both physically and spiritually. We are to stand guard against the enemy with fervent prayer. We are to pray lest we enter—be overcome by—temptation. We are to pray gratefully and not to worry anxiously. We are to pray in faith, nothing wavering.

It is the prayer of faith—the “vowful” prayer; the prayer of self-dedication prompted by the persuasion of the Holy Spirit—that accomplishes the work of God in our lives and in the world. As we look more closely at that attribute, we recognize it in those ancient patriarchs who prayed their simple prayers and had God move so wondrously in their lives.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What is to closely accompany putting on the full suit of God’s armor?
2. Where was Paul when he asked for prayer?
3. What specific prayer request for the “gospel” did he make?
4. What did Paul believe would turn his sufferings into salvation?
5. Name four kinds of prayer mentioned in I Timothy 2.

LIFE APPLICATION

As Christian in *Pilgrim’s Progress* learned at House Beautiful, the armory provided pilgrims with not only the helmet, breastplate, sword, shield, and shoes, but with “all-prayer” as well. It is through prayer that we “put on” the various pieces of protective equipment provided by the Lord Jesus. Indeed, we “put on” Christ Himself: this is only by earnestly seeking Him in prayer. It is through prayer that we learn to know God’s personal commands for us and the necessary things for which to ask. Through prayer we begin to understand His great work and plan for the spread of the kingdom.

There is no greater witness to this truth than observing how untiringly the enemy works to keep us from earnest prayer. Why? Because he knows how effective and powerful it is. We may try to witness without prayer. It will not prosper. We may even preach without preparing with fervent prayer. It will be powerless. Yet quiet, unassuming saints of God who rarely speak a public word move spiritual mountains while on their knees. Would we fight the

“good fight” of faith? Would we fight “not beating the air”? Then let us fight with dedicated, intense, intercession which hits the mark and prevails over the adversary.

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

One stormy night on April 12, 2020, I was preparing to go to sleep. My heart started to feel very heavy and I couldn't breathe. I have asthma, but this was different. I was going to call for my grandma, but then I thought of something she had said about calling on God for myself.

This was a very scary time for me. I was alone with no one to help me, and I couldn't get to the door. Again I thought of what my grandma had said. I began to call on God for help. I said, “Please help me!” I really felt like I was dying. I asked God to help me and my mom, who was also so sick. I told him I would do whatever it takes for Him to heal us. I would gladly give Him my life if He would only heal my mom and me, please.

Then I went to bed. I felt my body lifted up. It felt like a cool breeze went over my body and back down inside of me. I then was able to breathe again! I said, “Thank you, Lord, for healing me and my mom,” and I started sharing this testimony with my grandma and everyone I could the next day.

I have been living my life for the Lord. I'm still growing in the Lord and need your prayers. My heart's desire is to go to heaven; please keep me in your prayers.

—Faith Surita, AL

MARCH 28, 2021

WATCHING WITH ALL PERSEVERANCE

Matthew 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

Matthew 26:41 Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.

I Corinthians 10:12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

I Corinthians 16:13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

Ephesians 6:18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

I Timothy 6:12a Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.

II Timothy 2:3 Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.

I Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

9 Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

MEMORY VERSE: Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. —I Corinthians 15:58

CENTRAL THOUGHT: A closing reminder that, having put on the full armor of God, we must not only fight with fervent prayer, but watch, persevere and endure steadfastly unto the end.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 24:12 “Iniquity shall abound”: lawlessness shall increase; wickedness will multiply; sin will be rampant. “Wax cold”: originally, “to breathe or blow; and the picture is that of spiritual energy blighted or chilled by a malign or poisonous wind” (Vincent’s Word Studies). “The tendency of all such times, as seen in the histories of famines, and pestilences, and revolutions, is to intensify selfishness, both in the more excusable form of self-preservation, and in the darker form of self-aggrandisement” (Ellicott’s Commentary for English Readers).

Matthew 24:13 “Endure”: to remain under the load; bear up; persevere.

Matthew 26:41 “Watch”: stay awake; be vigilant; be on the alert.

I Corinthians 16:13 “Quit you like men”: behave like a man; act manly; be responsible and courageous; be brave.

Ephesians 6:18 “Perseverance”: persistence; steadfastness.

II Timothy 2:3 “Hardness”: suffering; affliction; painful hardship.

I Peter 5:8 “Be sober”: abstain from wine; circumspect; discreet. “Vigilant”: on the alert; keep awake. “Walketh about”: prowls at large. “Devour”: drink down; gulp entire; destroy; swallow up; consume.

I Peter 5:9 “Steadfast”: stiff; firm, rigid; will not budge; sure.

I Corinthians 15:58 “Stedfast”: well seated; solidly based; morally fixed.

LESSON BACKGROUND

The disciples asked Jesus to prepare them for the destruction of Jerusalem; they also wanted to know the signs for the end of the world. Jesus included instructions for both events in Matthew 24. Today, we may understand verse 12 to mean the horrible conditions surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, but we may also apply them to the time of the end, which is certainly the time in which we live. Both conditions apply, both then and now. Adam Clarke quoted from Eusebius: “It is very remarkable that not a single Christian perished in the destruction of Jerusalem.” That may have been a literal salvation, in that none lost his life, but at the end of the world, He is speaking of saving our souls from eternal damnation, the second death.

Likewise, His warning to His disciples to watch and pray while they were in the garden with Him before His crucifixion can also be applied to all Christians, at any time. Their temptation was to deny Him, which Peter regrettably did; and flee when He was in peril, as all the rest of them did when they forsook Him and fled into hiding. Our temptation is to become lukewarm and sleepy when the dangers of falling into the enemy’s power are most keen.

Paul issues the warning to the Corinthians that losing our footing at a dangerous spot is most likely when we become self-confident and not as alert as we should be. He also encourages us to be manly and responsible in our steadfast vigil. Our text from Ephesians sums up his message about Christian armor by reminding us that by prayer and watching persistently we will, through the Spirit, gain the victory.

In the first epistle to Timothy, Paul spoke in chapter one about fighting a “good warfare,” and continued in the sixth chapter charging Timothy to fight the good fight of faith

and lay hold on eternal life. In the second epistle he again refers to Christian warfare, encouraging Timothy to join with him in enduring the sufferings of the gospel “as a good soldier.” He ended his letters to Timothy by saying that he had fought a “good fight” and had “kept the faith,” adding that the Lord had stood by him and strengthened him, and he was certain that He would preserve him unto the heavenly kingdom (II Timothy 4:7; 17-18).

Peter closes his first epistle with the warning to be sober and vigilant because our adversary, as a roaring lion, walks at large, seeking those he could consume. The way to combat him, Peter said, is to resist him “steadfast in the faith.” Paul also encourages steadfastness in our memory verse.

Steadfastness, perseverance, and endurance are key to being successful in our Christian warfare all the way to the very end.

—Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. What is the danger of being surrounded by abounding iniquity, and what did Jesus promise those who endure that danger?
2. What is the danger of becoming self-confident in our stand? Why is that, according to Matthew 26:41?
3. About what danger did Peter warn us to be vigilant?
4. How do we combat this adversary, and why?
5. Name the keys to successful Christian warfare.

LIFE APPLICATION

In literal warfare, even the fully equipped soldier isn't a successful soldier if he is not on the alert, if he becomes over-confident and careless, if he goes AWOL, or if he surrenders to the enemy. In this final lesson in the series, we are warned to stay vigilant. There will always be temptations to our flesh, and we must remember that the flesh is weak. Only through daily watchfulness and prayer can we be victorious.

We are also to be on guard against evil spirits who attack the mind, the emotions, the affections. We are to gird on truth to stabilize and protect these vital areas. Let us remember the word meanings when we consider the power of these enemies. If we sympathize with a spirit, or lag behind when we should resist steadfastly, or give in “just a little bit,” Peter writes that satan’s intent is to “devour” or consume. We’re thinking it’s a little matter, but the adversary says, “Finish him off.” Have you ever observed someone whom the enemy has “finished off”? It is a tragic end.

I want to end with a reminder of our majestic hero, the Captain of our salvation. Psalms 24 has a scene which others have applied to the time of the ascension, and also to the end of the final battle. In it, Jesus is ascending up on high. He has conquered death and sin. He is leading a train of battle spoils and triumphant warriors. As He nears the portals, a voice rings out, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in!” Another voice responds, “Who is this King of glory?” The triumphant answer is, “The LORD of hosts, He is this King of glory”! A description in the book of Revelation adds to this scene, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever”! I want to be there, don’t you? When they hand out the crowns. When we cast our crowns of victory down before the King, and join with the white-robed throng in jubilant praise. Hallelujah, hallelujah!

—Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

I will tell you of how I learned about faith and availing prayer and how these have helped me to begin to get miraculous results in my walk with the Lord.

Well, while growing up in church and also during a time when I was a little newer in my walk with the Lord, I used to hear people say that God spoke to them. I wondered why He did not speak to me. I also used to hear about faith as well. Like, “What was it? Did I have to be really up in age to have it?” Well, going along in my walk with the Lord where I learned to pray more, I soon began to experience God talking to me. Specifically, many times when I would wake up I would have a song of Zion or a line of one going through my mind already, when I knew that I had not read or referenced these at any time during the prior day or week.

Also, sometimes there would be a fresh feeling in my room when I woke up, as if a

chorus of angels had been hovering above my bed near my ceiling, singing songs. What a peace that the world could not give me! A couple of other saints witnessed that they have felt things like that too, and said that it was God. Then, sometimes at a point during the day, as in when something trying was happening or I would see a request of mine being answered, a line of a song or a scripture itself would come to my mind. I began to recognize these as Jesus speaking to me, encouraging me. What a comfort.

But now, back to that question about having faith and what it actually is. One time a problem loomed before me and I knew I needed an answer of “yes” to this problem; I had to have it, but every avenue was being shut to me. I took hold of what two older saints had said before. Specifically, one minister had said, “When you have a problem, just keep mentioning it to God in prayer all day, every time you think about it.” Another elder and mighty prayer warrior, when major obstacles or impossible-looking situations would arise in her path, was known to say, “That’s alright, I know how to pray.” And I would see this saint testify time and time again about how this or that major obstacle had come up and how she had prevailed with a miraculous overturning of the situation through prayer and not letting go!! So I said, “Hmm.” And taking those examples and exhortations in mind, I began to plead my case about the problem I was dealing with before the Lord. And, as you might have guessed, I did get a miraculous answer to prayer in that situation.

However, it didn’t stop there. I learned because of that positive result to apply that same tactic over and over to many other obstacles that came my way (and still do!). In fact, I have seen countless answers to my own prayers this way and have also come to learn that a request may not be answered right away, but that it may take some time, praying across months (“...the battle may be long and hard to win!”—a line from the song, “On the Winning Side”). I know this formula works. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (II Corinthians 10:4).

—Victoria Edwards, FL