

Sept 19th 2010: Armour of God Series: Better Than Excalibor:Ps 119:162-176

When I was a kid I can remember being fascinated by stories about King Arthur, the first really great king of England. Stories of Camelot, of the knights of the round table, and especially stories about his famous sword Excalibor. The story goes that this sword was embedded in a rock and it was declared that no man but he who was the rightful heir to the throne would ever be able to dislodge it. Many grand knights attempted to do so but all failed until a young 14 year old boy, needing to procure a sword for a friend who was due to battle in the lists that day but had somehow forgotten his sword, grabbed hold of that sword because it was closer than having to go all the way to his friends house to get his, and of course it slid easily out of the rock into his hands. So it became apparent that he was the chosen one and the sword was an awesome weapon with magical powers. It was written of the sword 'Excalibor', that it was the finest sword that there was which sliced through iron as through wood.'

Today we are talking about a sword that belongs only to the chosen of God. A sword freely given to us who have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is mightier and infinitely better than any 'excalibor' could ever be. For it is the sword of the Spirit. (Ephesians 6:17).

Like the shield of faith this too is a gift of God that we receive so freely from Him, and it has been given to us for the battles we must fight as we journey through this earth to glory. Battles that Ephesians 6:12 tells us are:

"not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

We have joined with our Saviour, who is our Commander in Chief, against the evil that seeks control over the souls and destiny of mankind; against a force that is powerful and must never be underestimated, but whose eventual defeat is assured. And even as our leader is described in Revelation 1:16 as a supreme warrior who has a sharp double-edged sword coming out of His mouth, so He gives us the sword of the Spirit. A mighty weapon that will not only defend us against attack, but will take the battle right up to the enemy and be used to rescue souls and situations from his evil grasp.

This sword of the Spirit is further described as 'the word of God' and every child in Sunday School is taught from an early age that such is the Bible.

How many remember the sword drills that were a part of many a Christian Endeavour meeting where a verse was called out and the race was on to see who could find it first??

And of course the Bible itself supports that definition, often speaking about God's word being like a sword, while Psalm 119 is packed full of the benefits that knowing and using God's word provides. There were so many portions of it that I could have had read this morning in support of that, and in the end I chose the well known verses that include Psalm 119:11-

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you".

And the rest of the verses we read show how a knowledge and meditation upon God's word helped the Psalmist to cope with all the ups and downs of life and the slanderous attacks of his enemies.

But what we need to realize is that to say that our Bible is the sword and if we know the Bible then we must be holding the sword of the Spirit in our hands, is not what Ephesians 6:17 is saying. I have known people who have a wonderful knowledge of the Scriptures. They can quote reference and verse till the cows come home. But that doesn't mean that they have in their hands the sword of the Spirit that is the word of God.

Consider again what Ephesians 6:17 actually says:-

"and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"

It doesn't use the Greek word for Scriptures here and say that the sword of the Spirit is the Scriptures of God. It clearly uses a Greek word that we translate into the English 'word'. But the thing is that in the Hebrew and the Greek there are at least 4 different words that are very different in their meaning, and we translate them all by using the English 'word'! For example the Hebrew word used in Psalm 119 refers specifically to the laws and commandments of God and there is another Hebrew word that refers to the actual word of God as spoken by the prophets. Both are very different yet mainly we use 'word' to describe them both. Then in the New Testament we have the Greek λόγος(logos) which is used to describe Jesus as the Word and is also used in Hebrews 4:12 to talk about ***"the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."***

When we come to Ephesians 6:17 and the sword of the Spirit, the Greek language is so specific when it says 'word' for it uses rhema. And rhema refers to God's word being spoken or uttered in conversation or writing. The rhema of God is the speaking out to others what God has put in the Scriptures. So in this case the sword is not knowledge of the Bible. We can study the Bible till we know every verse it contains but still not have our hand on the sword. The sword is speaking out that knowledge and especially the words of the Gospel.

But the one other thing about the sword that we must not miss is that it is the sword of the Spirit. It belongs to the Spirit and He is in control of its use. So we are not to go and spout Bible verses at someone in an indiscriminate way. Not to go and Bible bash someone just because we feel that's what we should be doing as good Christians. Instead we are to rely on the Spirit to speak through us the word of God, and He promises to do so at the right time and with the right message.

There was a time when I worked for a firm that had a work van and on occasion I had to use that van to go about the work's business. Now I drove that van, and did so according to the way I drive—but at all times I was conscious that I was an employee using the employers vehicle to help me perform the employers wishes.

In like manner I am now seeking to serve the Lord God who desires that His message of love and salvation goes out into all the world. And to enable me to be a part of that He has given me, not a work van, but the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. At times the Lord will lay upon my heart a person I need to speak to, or will connect me with someone that needs to hear a word of God, and then He expects me to trust Him to give me by His Spirit, the word of God which is just right for that person at that time.

And the really exciting thing is that the Spirit does that. The sword of the Spirit is shown to be powerful. The Spirit brings to mind a verse or a phrase or a thought from the Scripture that comforts, challenges, advises, sustains, motivates, inspires and so on....And the person is touched by God because I trusted in the Spirit to wield His sword through me.

And what's more: This is true for everyone, not just for Pastor's or Bible scholars. Even as I was allowed to drive that van in my own way as long as it was legal, so God uses each believer according to our own personality and

ability. He won't ask you to do anything that He knows is beyond you. You may feel that you only have limited knowledge of God and his Word. Well the Spirit will use that. But of course, the more of the Word you put into your mind and your heart, the more the Spirit will draw forth from you.

This sword of the Spirit is possibly the most exciting and important piece of the armour of God and I am constantly hearing stories of the sword being used in our fellowship. Just last Friday when I was in the midst of my preparation I had a phone call from someone in some distress, but the amazing thing was that just after the moment of crisis they had received a phone call from a church person. And that person had felt compelled to ring them at that moment. And when they had heard of the crisis they had been given by the Spirit just the right word of God to say to them. The word that had helped that person to know that God was with them.

Ten minutes after that phone call another person from the church called into see me and they shared with me a story they had heard about the way yet another person from the church here had become a Christian. And it was through a lady who had shared about her many trials of life with this person, and this person who was quite anti-Christian at the time then asked her how she stayed so positive though all her suffering. And the Christian lady replied, "Because I have Jesus in my life".

Two everyday examples of regular believers using the sword of the Spirit. What an effective weapon this is against the evil one. He brings to mind every promise of God so that we not only console, comfort, and encourage others, but also do the same for ourselves.

He gives us the word in due season that challenges and converts. The Spirit knows exactly what needs to be said and prompts us to say it, and especially the Spirit keeps us faithful to the Word of God.

So finally, effectiveness with this weapon depends upon the Spirit and not us for it is His sword. But we must take in the word of God at every opportunity and not treat it lightly, for not one of us knows when we may be called upon to wield the Spirit's sword. And above all we need to be constantly available. Sensitive to the Spirit's leading, for the joy of using the sword well is a truly blessed thing. And through it we will not only find protection but the power to overcome the lies of the evil one, and to see God's kingdom grow.

