

August 22nd 2010: Armour of God Series #4 Protection For the Heart

I have been pastoring different Baptist Churches now for over 37 years and during that time I have learnt a lot about myself and about Christians in general. And one thing I have noticed is that in the battle against the evil one it is our personal sufficiency in Christ that he attacks the most.

He loves to make us feel that we are just not good enough for this or for that. That we are failures in God's sight. That though we claim forgiveness often, it doesn't really change anything, and we are second rate, while others are doing fine.

Especially is this the case when we feel that God the Holy Spirit may want to, or indeed is leading us, to be involved in some deeper area for Jesus. It could be a ministry that would take us right out of our comfort zone and into the place where the battle for souls is intense. Or perhaps it is speaking the word of challenge to one who the Lord is drawing to Himself, and for some reason He has decided that we should be the one to speak the actual words. Whatever it is, we know instinctively that the cost will go way beyond time, money, convenience, for it will test the state of our hearts; the strength of our commitment to Jesus. We know that it will demand a worthiness and purity from us that we sense we cannot offer. We want to be willing to be available for whatever the Lord desires of us but at the same time we are fearful of His call, because we might not be able, or the task may be beyond us.

I trust and hope that you understand what I am talking about here. That you can relate such feelings to your own past experience of living for Jesus even as I can, or even feelings you are experiencing now. For it is only as we recognize such fears within that we can discover that such is the work of Satan who delights to convince us that we are not good enough to do such and such for Jesus. That we are not strong enough, or know enough to be a soldier in that particular battle for the kingdom.

You see the devil is the master of deception and of twisting the truth. When he whispers into your heart that you are not good enough for this task, or will never overcome a particular sin, he will also remind you quite truthfully, of past wrongs and failings. He will paint a picture of you that you will not like very much and he will work at convincing you that being a Christian hasn't really changed that. Then he will point to others who are obviously so

much better than you are and surely, if the Lord was to ask anyone to do this task for Him, it would be them.

The devil's aim is to keep Christians from serving the Lord at a deep level of commitment by reminding them constantly that they are not sufficient for the task. That they are not good enough to go beyond the mediocre to the heights that Jesus leads others into. And in a human sense he is absolutely right. No one is good enough to approach God let alone serve Him.

Isaiah found that out. He was a priest in the service of God yet when He saw God that day in the Temple in Jerusalem...saw God in all His holiness and glory....his first response was not: "Here I am Lord. I'm your man. Whatever you want doing send me, because I'm ready." Not at all. Isaiah 6;5 tells us:-

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

⁵Then I cried out, "I'm doomed! Everything I say is sinful, and so are the words of everyone around me. Yet I have seen the King, the LORD All-Powerful."

Isaiah wasn't going anywhere or doing anything for God. He knew he was not good enough. But then God cleansed him. And after that when God said, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?, Isaiah doesn't hesitate at all but says, "Here am I. Send me!"

So what made the difference? God did. In cleansing Isaiah He made Isaiah good enough to go for Him wherever God wanted him to go.

God accepted him. And that's exactly what God has done for us in Christ. Paul says in Romans 3:22-25b

²²God treats everyone alike. He accepts people only because they have faith in Jesus Christ. ²³All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. ²⁴But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins. ²⁵⁻²⁶God sent Christ to be our sacrifice. Christ offered his life's blood, so that by faith in him we could come to God.

While we were in London we were able to see the play, The Lion King, and we were all totally impressed by the fantastic costumes and the skills of the actors that made the animal figures come alive. But it was the storyline that impressed me most. Of the young lion cub who flees his homeland after the death of his father because he believes the lie of his uncle, who tells him that he was responsible for his father's death. So Simba lives in the jungle with a warthog and a meercat while his Uncle takes over the kingdom and

slowly destroys it through his evil ways. Finally Simba returns but he has no power to take his rightful place as king while he still has the guilt of his wrongdoing hanging over him. It is only when he realizes that he did not kill his father but that his Uncle had, that he is freed from the guilt and able to defeat his enemies and gain his rightful throne. He needs to know that he has done no wrong.

We can never know that, for all the rotten things we have done throughout our lives and still do are real. The guilt we have for the way we have treated God and others is true guilt. The weaknesses we see in ourselves are indeed there and would prevent us from doing anything for God, except for Jesus. Unlike Simba we discover that we have truly blown any hope of putting things right again, but then, we don't need to. Jesus, God the Son, has done that for us. And God the Father gives us righteousness(makes us right and pure) that we can never destroy and the devil can never remove.

Romans 5:17.....

"For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

And again we read this in 2 Corinthians 5:23

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

That's a completed act. God has made us righteous in His sight as a gift and nothing can change that. AND if God, after cleansing us from our sin because of our trust in the Son, had then instantly transported us to heaven; had removed us from this body of sin and from this earth where evil is rampant.....then we would have had no problems believing that we were indeed righteous—perfect—good enough to do whatever our Holy and Perfect God asked us to do!!

But He didn't. He left us here on earth where our old nature is always hanging around, testing and tempting us. And although we know we are now God's children we still let Him down. That sinful part in us seems always to come to the fore when we least want it too. Lets the weakness in when we are trying so hard to be godly.

But God Knew that would happen and so He didn't leave us to battle alone and in our human strength. He came into our lives as God the Holy Spirit, to guide, enable, and to protect us. To seal us until Himself until that day when we will see Him face to face.

And He provided us with Armour for the ongoing battle of life. Armour made in heaven. Armour which includes the Breastplate of Righteousness.

To my mind it is the breastplate that most reveals the handiwork of God, for it is righteousness that enables us to stand in His holy presence. And it is the breastplate of Righteousness that allows us to serve Him here on earth.

When the devil comes along and points out our weaknesses and our failures, as he loves to do. When he points at the sins that so easily entangle us and the rottenness within that surely must disqualify us, we are able to respond by talking about complete forgiveness and the breastplate of righteousness that God has given us to wear.

We need to say to the devil, "yes, I accept the truth of my sins, failings, and weaknesses, but God has dealt with them. And what's more He has clothed me in the righteousness of Jesus. You may not want to admit it but God has made me righteous. He has made me good enough, despite my humanness. And to prove that fact He has given me this breastplate of righteousness which you have no way of penetrating. My heart is protected by God. His has given me the right to daily enter His presence with boldness. To approach His throne of Grace and gain all I need to do His will."

It is the knowledge that we have this breastplate which enables us to put aside the fear of inadequacy; of not being good enough; of being weak and insipid.

Instead we mentally and spiritually put on the breastplate and stand with courage in the power and might of Jesus.

This doesn't mean that we don't have to worry about our behavior. We still have to aim to overcome the rotten things we do and stay that detract from our Christian witness. For clothing ourselves with the breastplate involves acknowledging our faults and seeking cleansing for them. As 1 John 1:8-9 says:-

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

It would be foolish to think we can act in the spiritual realm like the little boy acted in the physical, when, after playing outside in the wet and the mud, he was called in to get ready for a visit to grandma. Having been shown the clean clothes he was to put on he reached out to do so, and was sternly told by mum that before he even touched them, he needed to wash the mud off.

In this pilgrimage that we are on, where it is vital that we reflect daily the righteous character of God, we need each morning to come to Jesus for His cleansing. To acknowledge the areas where we need His forgiveness. And then to deliberately put on the breastplate of righteousness.

So that as we go forth in the day we will know that we are protected from the lies of the evil one and, despite the attacks that come from without and within, we are ready and able to say to God, "Here I am, send me".

On my very last night in England I was in London, so I decided to visit the house of Parliament and to go into the visitor's gallery connected to the House of Commons. But before I could do that I had to go through this intensive security clearance, give my details, and have my photo taken. They affixed my photo to a lanyard which was hung around my neck and hung down on my chest. Then I was free to walk through the great hall of Westminster, through the corridors to the house of commons viewing area. Constantly I walked past security people and policemen who scrutinized, not me, but the authorization with my picture on it that hung around my neck. Because that was in order I was free to continue.

In a similar way we have been given this breastplate of righteousness that enables us to walk through life for Jesus. That gives us the right to speak in His name. The privilege of being Ambassadors for God and His Kingdom. The power to stand up against the scrutiny of the evil one. And the picture that hangs down in front of our heart?? It's not of us. It's of Jesus.

