

The Belt of Truth

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. Now that phrase there, spiritual attacks and spiritual warfare, I know that can be one of these things that can get a wee raised eyebrow from the corners of the room and people kind of smirk.

But Paul makes it clear in these verses that we are fighting spiritual attacks in our everyday lives. It won't always be the most dramatic or the most visual of battles, but that doesn't mean that it isn't real.

And it definitely doesn't mean that it isn't important. So these verses here, Paul lays out the armour that we've been given by God to make sure that we can stand up to the attacks of the devil.

And if you open your Bible to Ephesians 6.10, we'll go through it quickly now. It should come up on the screen. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that you may be able to stand up against the schemes of the devil.

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

[1:28] Therefore, take up the whole armour of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.

In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

So like you've seen, there's quite a few parts to the armour, and there's quite a few verses there, but today we're focusing on the belt of truth, from verse 14. I don't know about you guys, but when I was a kid growing up, I never really understood or got the armour of God.

It was always a really fun Sunday school lesson, because you got to make swords out of cardboard tubes, and shields out of tinfoil, and you could fight and beat up your sister in the sanctuary afterwards. But other than that, the whole thing, back a slide, the whole thing seemed a little bit abstract, and a little bit odd, to me at least.

But in particular, the belt. So the sword makes sense. If you're pushing on, and you're claiming ground for the Lord, the sword makes sense. The breastplate, and the shield, the helmet, they're obviously talking about protection.

[2:41] But to me, the belt always seemed a little bit out of place. Now, as a big fantasy reader, as a kid, I was very much in my element, with the sword and the shield, the breastplate and the helm.

I knew exactly what was going on with all of them. But the belt of truth, it didn't seem as grand as the rest of the set. A little strip of leather, or cloth, and it kind of stops your trousers falling down. Admittedly, if I'm mid-battle, I don't want my trousers around my ankles, but the rest of the set has a bit more kind of grandioseness to it.

But what I was missing then, it was a little bit of context. So what young Dan thought of, and he thought of a belt, is very 21st century, very fashion-orientated, little clasp.

But is that really what Paul was talking about? So, anyone else remember high school English? We had five W's for context and writing. We had the who, why, what, when, and where.

We're going to apply them to this verse quickly, and we'll see if we can get a better understanding of what we're actually looking at, whether we are looking at one of these lovely fashionable belts on the left. So who wrote this passage?

[3:49] Who wrote this verse? Paul wrote this verse, yes. We've been going through Ephesians for a while, and I've already said it four or five times. So hopefully you knew that one. Why was Paul

writing?

Well, Paul was writing to strengthen the church in Ephesus, and then by the Spirit to strengthen us today. Perfect. What was Paul writing about? Well, Paul was writing about a belt that we're trying to get a better understanding of, but he's also writing about the importance of God's truth in our life. It starts to come together in these next two, though. When was Paul writing? So Paul's letter to the Ephesians was written around AD 62. So you can start here to get a wee bit of a picture.

Maybe you've got an idea in your mind of what a first century kind of outfit in that part of the world might look like. Where was Paul writing this? What part of the world is Paul in? Well, Paul wrote this letter in Rome while under house arrest.

Now, house arrest meant that he would be continually accompanied by Roman guards, constantly. And there's even anecdotal historical evidence that says that he may have been handcuffed to at least one guard at a time, rotated through.

[4:57] Which means Paul spent an awful lot of time staring directly at a Roman guard in all of his armour. And believe it or not, the Roman guard's armour includes a belt.

So, instead of picturing the little fashionable leather cloth belt that keeps your trousers up, we should be picturing something a little more like this. Wonderful, Davey. Thank you. Slightly more going on than the belt in my wardrobe, at least.

It's not about you guys. So, this is what's known as a singular *militariae*. Pardon the Latin there. It was a symbol of status for guards and dignitaries and it would be everyday wear.

So, even if they weren't wearing the rest of their armour, they were wearing this belt. As well as showing everyone how important you were and how much more, you know, how valuable you were compared to regular citizens, what rank you held, it did also serve practical purposes.

So, this belt kept the tunic gathered together, which allowed the Roman guard to move freely and easily. It gave them a place to store their weapons and it provided a stable base. It was a stable base from which they built out the rest of the armour.

[6:05] Losing your belt when you're in battle or on patrol would not be a particularly good thing. Imagine chasing after someone on the battlefield or chasing a criminal down the street and then, bam! You're holding your weapons in your hand, tunic's woven a bit in the wind, everything's just gone chaos.

Losing the belt, missing the belt is a key part of their armour and it meant losing the valuable, visible symbol of their status. The belt here is not the little add-on that I pictured as a kid.

It's the fundamental item without which everything else starts to fall apart. That's what Paul wants us to have in mind when it comes to the truth. Not an unimportant little strip of leather but the fundamental base to our armour.

So if the truth is as important to our lives as the singular was for the Roman guards we better make sure that we know what truth is. So the world can offer us a lot of truths.

Films and TV and adverts all in particular they love to promise they'll tell us the truth and they tell us that happiness or satisfaction are just one promotion one relationship one drink away.

[7:10] Right? That a new car the latest phone can fill that empty space inside and if you go into any bookshop into any bookshop on the high street and you'll find shelves lined with self-help books telling you how to find your truth or explain that what's true for you might not be true for someone else but we all need to live our own truth.

The world will tell us that truth is relative to each person and it can be ever changing depending on how you feel where you are what's going on in the world but that's not what the Bible says about truth.

See biblical truth doesn't change with our situations or trap us into an endless cycle of always needing the next thing. John 8.32 says that the truth shall set you free.

The full verse actually says if you abide in my word then you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth shall set you free. Real truth biblical truth never changes.

It doesn't have us jumping through hoops it sets us free from all those toxic cycles and it's found in Jesus because he is truth. John 14.6 Jesus says I am the way the truth and the life.

[8:24] I don't know if you caught that there but it's not just that God speaks truth it's that God is truth I am truth. He can't lie. We can see this through the scriptures Old Testament and New.

We get Titus 1.2 In hope of eternal life which God who never lies promised before the ages began. Numbers 23.19 God is not a man that he should lie or a son of man that he should change his mind

and if that's not quite explicit enough for you Hebrews 6.18 literally says that it is impossible for God to lie.

So we know that God always tells the truth that what he says will come into being if God decides to say that a dead girl is just sleeping or that five loaves and two fish can feed 5,000 plus people it just becomes true it just happens.

So given we know God always tells the truth why do we so often so hard find it difficult to believe what he says about us? See God loves you more than that he actually really likes you.

Do you believe that? In your heart in the deepest part of your brain those thoughts that you don't share with anybody else do you speak about yourself the way that God speaks about you?

[9 : 36] Do you trust that he's telling you the truth when he tells you how he sees you? Or do you listen to what the world tries to say about you? So Isaiah 43 contains this beautiful passage where God is speaking about his people where he's speaking about you.

But now thus says the Lord he who created you O Jacob he who formed you O Israel fear not for I have redeemed you I have called you by name you are mine when you pass through the waters I will be with you through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you and when you walk through fire you shall not be burned the flame shall not consume you for I am the Lord your God the Holy One of Israel your Saviour I give Egypt as your ransom Cush and Seba in exchange for you because you are precious in my eyes and honoured and I love you is that how you think of yourself that you are loved precious honoured ransomed do you truly believe that God chose you called you by name that you are his that he's walking along with you through the hard times through the difficult times it's true okay it's a spoiler it is God loves us no matter what we've done see the belt of truth is a part of the armour of God because lies and deception are the weapons of the enemy

I want to use these verses from Isaiah to pull out three truths that I think are worth fastening onto our armour every day okay there's a sermon with three points it's groundbreaking truth one we are never alone there we go when you pass through the waters I will be with you through the rivers they shall not overwhelm you when you walk through fire you shall not be burned and the flame shall not consume you so a common thing people can struggle with is finding it hard to see God or to feel God with them during hard times okay it can be really easy to look around in a difficult situation and feel like you're alone that God's left you even David who's referred to as a man after God's own heart and at this point had slayed literal giants with God's help struggles with this Psalm 22 1 and 2 my God my God why have you forsaken me why are you so far from saving me from the words of my groaning my God

I cry by day but you do not answer and by night but I find no rest see God hadn't left David God was working through the situation David was in David was just struggling to see what God was doing we find it much kids are having a good time so we can find it much easier to see God moving or feel God moving in those good times okay those mountaintop moments in life they're much easier to describe as God moments footballers and athletes are my favourite examples of this you'll see them thank God when they feel you know they feel them with them when they win Eric Liddle in Chariots of Fire film when he won gold at the Olympics in 1924 he's famous for his quote when I run I feel God's pleasure he's not wrong okay I'm going to point that out he's not wrong what I'd really like to see is someone who's just been relegated in their interview come out and say I just felt God was out there with us today or the boy who just came last in the Olympics bent over double giving his interview just yeah

I knew this was God's plan for my life God always wanted me to come last in this race I knew it he was there with me just because we can struggle to see what he's doing or see him moving doesn't mean that he isn't with us in those harder times just because we're going through a difficult situation doesn't mean that God's abandoned us he doesn't promise that we will always have good times you won't find that verse what he does promise is that he promises he'll be with us in all of our times throughout the Bible we see it God's there for his people when times are tough he's with Daniel in the lion's den closing the lion's mouths he stands in the fires of the furnace protecting Shadrach Meshach and Abednego when Peter's in prison God opens the door and frees him and by the time Paul has got to Rome to write this letter God's been with him keeping him safe through shipwrecks and snakebites and everything else that could have gone through in my opinion one of the most comforting and encouraging verses in the entire Bible comes from Psalm 23 it says even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death

[14:14] I will fear no evil for you are with me rescued by those last little half sentence there because that first half is a depressing sentence God doesn't say that he's going to build a bridge over the valley he doesn't say that he's going to stop us having to walk through the valley he just says that he's going to walk through the valley with us so when Abby was four or five months pregnant with our first child I lost my job my six month probation period ended and I was given a week's notice that my contract was not going to be extended we were a young couple baby on the way rent to pay and no meaningful savings no savings at all really we'd seen God move in a massive way like two months prior we lost our house the landlord sold the flat from under us we were staring homelessness in the face and an undeniable God moment in the space of five minutes and one text we had a flat five minutes away in a nicer area for a cheaper rent just an undeniable God moment but in this moment that 40 minute walk home from the office I didn't honestly feel like God was there with me and there were a lot of times over the next few months where it was really hard for me to feel God with me feel God working as I applied hundreds and hundreds of jobs and I got nothing back time after time but he was there and he was working despite all of my fear despite all of my doubt he was doing what he does now after a few months I did eventually get a job thankfully hooray I got a job at a small startup company in Edinburgh and I went on to spend the next five plus years working there I got skills and experience they helped me to grow and to develop and without the things I learnt in that job nothing I've done since would have been possible I would never have had the chance to join the staff here I wouldn't have done what I'm doing currently professionally it was the first domino to fall in a long line of blessings and trials and just insane things that led me to be able to stand here and share with you today looking back now I can absolutely see what God was doing and see him moving through the situation because if I wasn't unemployed and I wasn't more than a little bit stressed there's not a chance I would have looked twice at a job advert from a tiny company in an industry that I'd never worked in God used the situation I was in to get me where he wanted me so I could learn what he had to teach me he was with me the entire way through God doesn't leave us Jesus puts it pretty plainly himself at the end of his time with the disciples Matthew 28 20 says I am with you always to the end of the age so truth one we are never alone truth two is that we are loved because you are precious in my eyes and honoured and I love you I love this version it is so simple but it's so powerful and it is really really important you are precious in my eyes and honoured and I love you see God loves you you are precious to him what do you think of when you hear the word precious does it bring to mind gold or silver or jewels or if you're a nerd like me golem chasing his ring just the one thing of value to him his one precious is that how you think of yourself precious great value worth and significance worthy of going to extreme lengths to rescue see you are so precious to God that he left heaven stepped off his throne and came down to earth to get you back isn't that mad a lot of Jesus' parables hammer this home even further the lost coin lost sheep prodigal son they all speak to how valued we are and how heaven rejoices when we come home no matter how lost you are how far from home you feel or what you've done you are precious to God and he loves you he's not particularly subtle about it either to be honest it's all through the bible nerd fact time did you know that in the ESV and NIV translations of the bible the word love appears over 550 times in each translation and it's not just love in general either the bible is full of verses telling us specifically of God's love for us Zephaniah 3:17 Lord your God is in your midst a mighty one who will save he will rejoice over you with gladness he will quiet you by his love he will exult over you with loud singing Ephesians 2:4 and 5 but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he love does even when we were dead in our trespasses made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved Romans 8:38 and 39 for I am sure neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord that is how much God loves us and that is how much God loves you there is nothing on this earth over this earth or under it that can separate you from his love for you that verse in Zephaniah reminds me of when Eloise would only sleep if we sang you are my sunshine to her just God quieting us with his love singing over us so we really are children of God and he really does love us that is what people in the world need to know and it's us that are called to tell them see Paul gives us this challenge in Romans 10 [20:20] Romans 10 sorry how then will they call on him in whom they have not believed and how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard more than just talking about it we're

called to show God's love to others in the world not just those that we agree with or those that we like but everyone see Luke 6 27 but I say to you who hear love your enemies do good to those who hate you Mark 12 31 the second is this you shall love your neighbour as yourself there is no other commandment greater than these John 13 34 to 35 a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you are to love one another by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another these verses all carry the truth that as much as we are loved by God we are called to carry that love out into the world to love each other to love our enemies see God loves everybody and he wants us to love everyone that is everybody even them even that person who just pinged in the back of your head there when I said that that person at work or school who rubs you the wrong way or you just can't get along with or you just find really difficult nothing they've done they're just a difficult person

God loves them and he wants you to love them that doesn't mean that you have to like everything they do or doesn't mean you have to think that they're perfect but it does mean living that truth that every single person you see is made in the image of God and is loved by God it means choosing to be kind it means choosing to see the value in people and helping them to see it themselves it's showing them his love in everyday situations and being his representative on earth living in a way that shows them daily the truth that they are valued and loved and welcome in this family so truth one remember thank you Julie truth two we are loved truth three we are redeemed by grace fear not for I have redeemed you so the Bible says that the wages of sin is death and it also says that we have all sinned so by rights we've all got to die to pay for what we've done there's a bill due and we're the ones who racked it up so we should pay it yeah that's the way the world works that's what would be fair right but thankfully

God's love isn't particularly fair it's full of grace and forgiveness and just endless second chances thanks I want to tell you a little story here one Sunday in 1865 we'll go back a wee bit a lady called Elvina Hall was attending a service at Monument Street Methodist Episcopal Church it is reported that this is quite a long service I don't know if the minister just had to say the name of the church a couple of times and I don't know if the length of the service had anything to do with what happened next but during what's described as a prolonged prayer time she took out a pen and started to doodle a poem and a blank page in her hymnal the words that she wrote would go on to encourage millions of people around the globe and they remain a reminder for us today of God's grace and the price that Jesus paid handwritten in the back of her hymnal in the middle of the service while the preacher droned on up front I wonder what that's like with the words that every Christian since I think is heard at some point

I hear the saviour say thy strength indeed is small child of weakness watch and pray find in me thine all in all for Jesus paid it all all to him I owe sin had left a crimson stain and he washed it white as snow all of that sin that we racked up all of the mess that we made throughout our lives Jesus paid for it he washed the stain of sin away not because we deserved it but because he loves us that much John 3 16 spells it out pretty well God so loved the world he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but shall have eternal life see God looked at you all that you had done all that you were and he decided that you were worth dying for he set his son to earth to live a perfect life and be killed to pay for the price of our freedom

Isaiah 53 5 he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed see Jesus death on the cross was brutal okay if you ever take the time to look into the historical reality of crucifixion and flogging it is genuinely horrific but Jesus went through it all because he wanted to redeem you to buy you back from sin to wipe your slate clean and call you home as he died on the cross Jesus said that it is finished I apologise in advance because I am about to butcher a second language third if you count English but the original Greek word used in John 19 is *teleo* and it is actually used to refer to the completing or discharging of a debt see it wasn't on the cross that Jesus life was finished or the mission was complete it was the debt is paid trying to work and earn salvation while we are on earth by trying to do things or work and earn it is a bit like washing dishes at a restaurant to cover a bill someone else has already paid

[26 : 14] Ephesians 2 8 puts it like this for it is by grace you have been saved through faith this is not from yourself it is the gift of God see Jesus paid the price for you and all you have to do is call on him when the devil tries to tell you that you're not good enough or you have to earn it or you've fallen too far you've done things too bad remember the debt is paid you are saved by grace to Leo it

is finished if you're sitting here today or you're listening online and you don't believe that that applies to you can I just encourage you that it does okay if you're sitting here and you've never known God or you're just starting to know God or you've been a Christian for years but there's still that part in your brain that believes that God doesn't love you that you're not good enough that he's left you all by yourself please let me encourage you that is a lie that's the devil talking trying to hold you back from all that

God has for you see the Roman soldier's belt was everyday wear and God's truth is ours so I encourage you each morning choose to turn away from what the world says about you and fasten on the truth of who God says you are that you are precious to him that you are loved so the truth is Jesus died for all of our sins to set us free that you'll never leave us alone you took all of our sin and all of our failure on himself and he wiped it all away you are his child you are loved and if you call on him then you are forgiven and free that is the truth that we hold on to we are saved by God's grace and Jesus death on the cross not by anything we can ever do or anything we can earn so stand firm having fastened on the belt of truth and remember the truth of who you are in God you are asking you