

Breastplate of Righteousness

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Date: 19 July 2026

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[0:00] This is a sermon from King's Church West Lothian. You know, if you were to go into a physical battle, maybe like in the Roman times with your sword and your shield, or even today, or in the 20th century, you might have your machine gun, or even today where it seems to me that war is, part of the time at least, seems to be almost like a computer game with drones dropping bombs on places.

What you would be, whatever the nature of the warfare looked like, you would absolutely be prepared. That would be something you would 100% want to be.

You'd want to be prepared because a case of life or death going into battle. Now, the kind of battle that Paul encourages us to be prepared for when he talks to us about the metaphor of the armour of God isn't a physical battle, but it is a spiritual battle.

Now, the Christian life isn't like a battle. It is a battle. And that's because, and it is so much more important to be prepared for this spiritual battle, even than a physical battle of life or death, because the stakes are so much higher.

In a physical battle, you might be fighting for life and death, absolutely, but in this spiritual battle that the Christian walk entails, you are, you're fighting for your eternal soul.

[1:50] You're fighting for the kingdom of God, which is going to last forever. So with that in mind, we're going to read the scripture. We're going to go through the whole bit. It's about seven verses, eight verses, and the words should come up behind me if you don't have a Bible in front of you.

There we go. Okay. Ephesians 6, verse 10 to 17. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is 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.

Therefore, put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you've done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.

[3:09] So I pray briefly. Lord, I want to thank you, God, for the privilege of preaching from your word. I pray, Lord, as I lead us into this topic of spiritual battle, I just pray you'd be with me, you'd be helping me, God.

I pray for the people sitting and listening. I pray that you would have something for each of them, that they would be able to receive of you, and help each one of us in our spiritual walk, in the battle that we face in this world.

Amen. Now, around about 200 or so years ago, there was a change in Western society about the way people think.

And this is commonly known today as the enlightenment. Enlightenment. And what the enlightenment was, or at least it's what people who think it was a good thing refer to it as, is the basic premise was that if something, so something to be known for sure, it has to be provable. Right? You cannot know something unless you can prove it. Right? And this resulted in a massive step forward in things like science and medicine and other things like that, that scientific experimentation took place to make sure that we knew things and that we could use them in the world.

[4:38] And up to a point, this is a really, really good thing, isn't it? Because it's good to be able to know things for sure and to have an empirical scientific way of proving it.

So, you know, if you went to see, if you went to see Annalie in her doctor's surgery and you said, oh, I've got this problem, I've got this disease. And Annalie said, well, I think this medicine here, I think this is going to solve it.

And you might say to her, well, why do you think that? And if she would say, well, just got a good feeling about it. You know, you might want a bit more, you might want a bit more than that, mightn't you?

Now, of course, she wouldn't do that because she's very good at this kind of thing. She'd say, well, it's this research, you see, that shows it will really, really work for your particular ailment. So in many ways, it's a really, really good thing.

And as I say, society has benefited from that in many ways. However, there is a problem, particularly when it comes to the realm of faith and belief, because the Bible speaks about faith as something that we, faith is being sure of what we hope for and being certain of what we do not see.

[5:42] This is primarily in the way we interact with God. And you can't really prove in the existence of God as such. Interestingly, the idea of the existence of God just scraped through this enlightenment by the skin of its teeth because people said, well, you know, if everything has a cause, so if I push over this little stand here, well, that had a cause, and the cause of that was me pushing over, if the cause of that was me walking into the room, and the cause of that is gravity, et cetera, et cetera, ultimately there had to be a cause which had no cause, doesn't there?

There has to be something to kick everything off, right? And that, as I said, was God. And so the enlightenment thinkers reluctantly accepted this as evidence that God might exist, although Priscilla probably doesn't, but we'll deal with that at some point in the future when we worked out what really was the uncaused cause.

So that's fine for maybe just about for the existence of God himself. But this little bit of scripture talks about something else. It talks about spiritual powers.

It talks about things like, it's referring, I should say, to things like angels, demons, the devil, things like that. And so with this enlightenment thinking, which we all live amongst, it's very, very difficult to talk about these things without sounding like a complete nutter.

Now, as sounding like a complete nutter doesn't massively bother me, that is what I am going to speak to you about today.

[7:19] Now, the biblical view of whether things exist or not takes a very different turn. The Bible, which is an older, not necessarily cleverer, but certainly wiser way of thinking than what the enlightenment presents, presents the spiritual world in this way.

It says there is a chief spiritual force. The spiritual force are called the Elohim in the Bible. There is a chief spiritual force who is supreme above all things, the creator.

He holds all things in his hands. Nothing is outwith his control. And he is sovereign over all. This force we normally refer to as God.

Under him, there are junior, lesser Elohim, spiritual forces. Now, these are divided roughly into good spiritual forces and bad spiritual forces.

The good spiritual forces who do the Lord's bidding, who do the things he asks them to, we usually refer to as angels. The bad spiritual forces are usually referred to in the Bible as demons.

[8:39] Now, the Old Testament presents this cosmic battle, which, remember, is going on beneath a good sovereign force. There aren't two equal and opposite things here.

There isn't good and evil are kind of clashing against each other and they're equal and the same. There is one positive, benign, good force, and underneath them, good and evil, having this battle. But the Old Testament presents these demons as false gods. So when you read in the Old Testament about characters like Molech and Dagon and Baal and Asharah, it's referring to these demonic false gods.

Now, the thing about these false gods is that they are, in their way, powerful. They seem to hold sway over nations at times or vast spiritual forces.

And yet, in some ways, it seems kind of strange because God, who is above all things, he doesn't seem, a lot of the time, that interested in doing that much about it.

[9:47] I mean, certainly there are moments, if you know your Old Testament, you will know there are moments when God absolutely shows that he is the boss and he totally undermines some of

these false gods who are lifted up to rival him.

But nevertheless, a state of cold war, almost, seems to exist a lot of the time in the Old Testament times between these good spiritual beings and these bad spiritual beings.

That is until Jesus comes on the scene. Jesus is presented not just as a man, not as a spiritual force, but as that cosmic creative force coming amongst mankind, living and walking amongst us as a human being.

And when he shows up, all hell is let loose. Let's look at the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

Turn with me to Mark chapter one. We're going to read from verses 21. They went to Capernaum.

[11:06] And when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then, a man in their synagogue who's possessed by an impure spirit cried out, What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth?

Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God. Be quiet, said Jesus sternly. Come out of him. The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out with him with a shriek.

The people were all so amazed. They asked each other, What is this? A new teaching? And with authority. He even gave orders to impure spirits and they obey him. Now, I don't want you to miss just how extraordinary what is going on here is.

Jesus, the man who is God, is walking amongst the domain of these demonic forces and he is ordering them around. Just imagine for a second if we were to go back to World War II and if Winston Churchill should walk into the Hitler's control room in his hideout in the Alps, just him, no soldiers, no sergeants, no machine gun with him, just him on his cane and he started, Hitler, I want you to surrender.

Just imagine if he did that and just imagine then, just imagine if Hitler, if Hitler did it, if he just, just there and then, just surrendered with no seeming power behind him. That is what's going on here.

[12:50] There is a strange spiritual thing going on with this guy called Jesus that the demons recognise but none of the other people seem to know what's going on. the man who is God has come to take back his territory.

Jesus' ministry, as well as being one of miracles, of being one of amazing teaching, was one of an exorcist. Now, the exorcist isn't just a creepy film from the 1970s.

It's what Jesus went around doing. Seven separate occasions, Jesus is recording, doing very, very similar things to this. Going to people and driving out demons out from within them.

I think we can assume there was many other cases beside that. Even his enemies, the Pharisees, this is what they said, they didn't deny that this stuff was going on. They, instead of denying that he was, he was actually driving out these demons, they said, well, it's not by God he's driving out these demons.

It's, it's by the prince of demons, by, by Satan himself that, that Jesus is driving out these demons. Now, that's true of Jesus.

[14:04] Now I want you to get this. About halfway through the gospel, Jesus sends out his disciples. Jesus, who's had this ministry of healing the sick, raising the dead, driving out demons.

He sends out his disciples and he tells them to do three things. He tells them, heal the sick, raise the dead, and drive out demons. And when the day, when the disciples go into this enemy territory and they, they do, they do these things because the demons, they see that the disciples have the same authority on them that's given to them by Jesus himself.

Now, I have found, I could say to some degree, I've found this true, true to be, to be true, I should say, in my life.

Now, I'm not going to, I don't want to take myself as some great spiritual warrior because I'm really, really not. But I've found that moments when I have engaged in what is sometimes called spiritual warfare when I've been praying with people, I've sometimes found that demonic activity does seem to arise.

A few years ago, I was leading a small group and there was this guy who used to turn up and he did, he clearly had some deep psychological problems but he, during our Bible studies, he would often, he was very quiet, he would kind of mutter to himself but particularly during the Bible studies he would become quite distressed and you could see he was kind of muttering himself and he used to do this thing where he would say stuff that was just totally untrue, just rubbish, almost like

conspiracy theory type stuff, just mad stuff.

[15:45] And, you know, obviously, I was thinking what the hell do I do about this guy? But I spoke to somebody who was a doctor, a psychiatrist and I said, you know, he does this thing where he just says stuff which isn't true and she said, well, you know, you can't actually just say that's wrong, that's not true.

And so I thought, okay, well, I'm going to give that a crack then. So, the guy, this same thing went on again, he was muttering to himself and then he just, he said, I can't remember what it was but it was just some total, just rubbish, you know, that he believed and I said, I said, that's wrong, that's not right, that's not true and this is honestly what happened, he jumped up and he yelled in my face, yes it is and then he ran out of the house screaming, right?

Now, I mean, I'm not laughing at the guy, I'm really not laughing at the guy, I just think there was some kind of demonic activity that was going on in him and following that his, him and his family started to the kind of, I think the words troll me online, I think that's the word where they would on like, I was on Facebook at the time and I had a, I have a website or had a website because I had a business and they would just like put little comments on there and again, not like sensible stuff that would make sense, just weird stuff they would put on and I don't know but I just feel, I felt the time and I feel now that because I was at a place where I was speaking to people like Jesus regularly, I was talking to them about him, I just felt that demons sit up and take notice when that happens. You know, even preparing for this, I don't talk about this stuff, I know some of you are guests here and you think, why do these guys always go about demons? We don't very much, honestly. Ask the regulars, we really don't. I was, I was, I was thinking about this stuff this week and I honestly feel this week, there was some, there's some attack stuff going on, there was, in my thoughts, just moments of like, of anger, of malice, of lust, of things that, things that would be, I mean, I'm not going to try to say my mind is pure as the driven snow because it isn't but stuff that would just be at a level way beyond anything I would normally experience.

And the other night, and this is just completely out of character, I think it was either Monday or Tuesday night, I didn't sleep awake, I literally, I was awake all night and I just, I mean, I mean, speak to my wife, I'm head hit the pillow asleep type of person, I was awake all night, I got to like half past one, half past two, eventually I just got up because I thought, this isn't going to happen here, spend some time with God and that was good but, you know, we do, the point I'm saying is it's kind of real, I know that sounds a bit weird, the stuff that I'm talking about and it is a bit weird, I'm trying not to be too weird about it but there is a positive side to this as well, we're in a spiritual battle but God is with us and he gives us tools to be able to fight that spiritual battle, so just last week actually, Andre, who is one of our members here, he's actually not here today but Andre asked me, probably the most biblical thing that certainly in my time as an elder, anybody has ever asked me, Luke was with me, do you remember what he asked me Luke?

[19:03] He said, he said, he'd had, yes, he'd hurt his back, he works in a kind of warehouse so he's often doing heavy labour, he said, my bag has gone, will you anoint me with oil and pray for me?

Right? Now, if you read the book of James towards the end of the New Testament, you don't need to turn so I'm just going to read it for you if I can find it quickly, this is what it says, it says, chapter 5, verse 14, is anyone among you sick?

Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well, the Lord will raise them up. Do you know what folks, I felt terrible because I let Andre down, because you know what, I didn't have any oil with me, and we kind of laugh at that a little bit because why would I have oil with you?

Well, do you know what, it says in the Bible that at the very least an elder of a church should have oil to pray for the sick so, and this is, you're going to laugh about this but it is absolutely serious, have this with me, this is olive oil, yeah, nothing spiritual, nothing fancy about it, it came out of my cupboard, right, if anybody asks me, if anybody's sick, I am ready and willing to pray with you and that's a genuine offer, I don't mean that to be frivolous or flippant at all, that is a genuine offer, so, and please ask me, I am more than happy to do it.

So, we have weapons that God gives us but of course, the weapons that he asks us to in this particular passage are slightly different, he says, he says, you've got to take your stand against the devil's schemes, what are the devil's schemes?

[20:53] I'm going to highlight two of them, first of all, the devil's primary scheme is this, lies, the devil deals in lies, Jesus refers to Satan as the father of lies, lies, lies, you remember the story in the Garden of Eden, the tree in the middle of the garden, the serpent comes to Eve and says, oh did God really say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

Oh yeah, no he did, he said, don't eat of the tree, in fact don't even touch it, so she says, oh you will surely die, you will not surely die, a lie, you will surely die, the first thing the serpent, the Satan has to say is a lie, he says that God doesn't want you to eat this fruit because then you'll be like him, God doesn't want you to be like him, so says the devil, that's a lie, God does want you to be like him, in fact, he made man and woman in his image, he made them to be like him, the devil deals in lies, now I think in this day and age we're more exposed to lies than ever we have been before, the majority of that is through the social media that many of us expose ourselves to and there is algorithms set up as we scroll through social media, algorithms set up just to lie, not to anybody, but particularly to you, the algorithm knows you probably better than your mum, your dad, your kids, your spouse do, it knows what makes you tick and the lies are there, they're specially for you, the ones on your phone, on your device, designed especially for you.

now, how do we get by that? Well, there is one option, it's just to turn it off, there is that option, but I'm well aware that if I was to say that probably mostly wouldn't do it and maybe neither you should, but there's rules of thumb that you can work towards.

If social media is giving you a barrage of lies, you read the Bible, it will give you a barrage of truth. Here's a rule of thumb that I think is a healthy one to work to.

Use social media by all means, but if you're spending more time on social media than you are reading and meditating on the word of God, you've got the balance wrong. Okay?

[23:48] And I'm aware that there are tools probably on your phone that will show you exactly how long you've used Facebook, Instagram, whatever for. Use them, look at the time, and then go, right, have I spent that long time in the word of God?

If you haven't, less social media, more word of God. That's my top tip. I'm afraid I can't do any better than that. But you know, Paul has an interesting phrase here.

He says, look out for it as the day of evil comes. As the day of evil comes.

In the lead up to the First World War, just as Europe collapsed into war, Edward Gray, the foreign minister of Britain, he said this, he says, he says, the lights are going out all over Europe.

Well, I don't know about you, but I look at today's world, I feel like the lights are going out all over the world. The international order as we know it is collapsing around us.

[24:52] To be honest, I'm pretty sure that future historians will look back at the crises of today, the war in Ukraine, the Straits of Hormuz, China's aggression towards Taiwan, and I'm pretty sure that they will look at those conflicts as the opening firing shots of World War III.

There is a day of evil approaching, friends, and although we shouldn't despair about that, it's good for us to be aware of what's going on.

Now, oppressive governments have always used lies to bad mouth the opposition, to suppress their people. What's increasingly becoming the case, though, is that the West do just the same.

This is personified no more than the current incumbent of the White House, Donald Trump. It is an established fact that Trump is a liar on an industrial scale.

The Washington Post did look through all of his statements that he made during his first term in government, and they reported that during those four years, he said false or misleading statements, 30,573.

[26:19] That was during his first term. Now, I'm not saying this because I think people should or shouldn't vote for Trump. I don't really care if I'm honest if people vote for him or not.

I'm pretty certain that nobody in here has a vote in the American election anyway. What I'm saying is that lies are a tactic of the devil.

And we should be aware when temporal leaders, whether he's in Washington or Taiwan or Beijing or Iran or Russia or even dare I say it in Westminster or Hollywood, we should be aware that when leaders use lies to suppress the truth for their people, that they are playing the devil's game.

Okay? They are tools of the devil. They're pawns. I'm not saying that any of these guys are the devil incarnate or the antichrist or anything like that. I'm saying that they're pawns.

And as believers in Jesus, as ones who embrace the truth, we just need to be aware of it. We've got to be aware of what's going on. And that sometimes these ones, these leaders will pose as angels

of light, as Jesus himself, in order to get their agenda across.

[27 : 40] And as believers in the real Jesus, we need to be aware of that. Now, it's interesting, isn't it, that the devil's first scheme is to use lies.

The first bit of armour that Paul encourages us to use is the belt of truth, buckled round your waist. Dan spoke to us last week about truth that helps us hold our clothes and our weapons together.

He said that we're never alone, but we always have him with us. He said that we are loved and we know that because Jesus died for us. He said that we are redeemed. These wonderful truths help us hold together our faith and not to be distracted by lies that come at us here and there.

The devil, though, he has a second scheme. Shall I tell you what the second scheme is? If he finds that lies doesn't work, do you know what he uses? He uses accusation. He's referred to in Revelation 12 as the accuser of the brethren, the accuser of the people who believe in Jesus, the accuser of the brothers and sisters.

And here's the interesting thing about when Satan accuses us, he's actually telling the truth. Initially he uses lies, lies don't work, okay, I'll go back to the truth.

[29 : 03] And he'll say to us, you're rubbish. You're no good. He'll remind us of our sin. He'll remind us about the sin that we've repented for, maybe even today, and yet we've fallen back into that sinful pattern.

And we go, you're rubbish. God couldn't love you. And here's what we do. Here's our comeback to the devil.

We say, well, it's true. I did do those things. But this, friends, is where you need the breastplate of righteousness.

Now, a breastplate, I'm sorry, I'm really bad at getting pictures of stuff. I'm not like good preachers who always get a good physical picture.

Breastplate is like this thing which covers your vital organs, doesn't it? The lungs, the stomach, the intestines, the bowels, but most of all, the heart.

[30 : 09] It covers the heart. Now, in Hebrew thought, the heart, and in fact actually different vital organs dotted around here, that's where you feel your emotions.

Now again, in these enlightened times, we think, no, that's not right. all of our emotions are there in our mind, they're in our brain, but you know, I'm not so sure. I'm really, I'm not so sure.

I mean, when I had my first date with Becky all those years ago, I didn't have butterflies in my brain. I definitely had butterflies in my stomach.

When my team's about to take a penalty kick, my heart is never, sorry, my mouth is never in my brain. My mouth, my heart is in my mouth. Sorry, I'm getting a bit muddled up there.

At times when I get really scared, if I'm watching a scary movie and it's coming to the scariest bit right at the end, my brain doesn't fail me, my bowels, well, you get that picture.

[31 : 13] I'll say no more. Nevertheless, whatever the truth of it is, the Hebrew understanding is that our emotions are felt in the vital organs, but the respirator righteousness is there to protect us.

The prophet Jeremiah said, the heart is, I can't quite remember the phrasing, the heart is duplicitous above all things, who can understand it?

Here's what Jesus says, Matthew chapter 15, please, I'll leave. He says, out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.

These things come out of the human heart, so we need to protect it with righteousness.

righteousness. So, when these things come out of our heart, there's the list, comes from the Lord himself, these things come out of our heart, when they come out of our heart, we need to put righteousness in place.

We need to think about the person who we're slandering, who we're having evil thoughts of murdering, of lying about, we need to think, well no, that person is loved by God, that person Jesus cares about, Jesus died for.

[32 : 43] We need to put a breastplate of righteousness in place, which pings away all of the false accusations of the evil one. Now, I know what you're thinking, and I think the same thing myself, saying, well, I can't do that.

My righteousness isn't enough. The devil's already shown me that I'm useless, I'm rubbish. Well, here's the good news, folks. We don't have to rely on our own righteousness.

When Jesus died on the cross, a great exchange took place, where he took our sin on himself, and he bore the wrath of God for us.

In exchange, the one truly righteous man who ever lived, he gave us, his righteousness. That breastplate of righteousness which allows us to, which protects our heart, our lungs, our emotions, that's Jesus' righteousness.

We know perfectly well that in ourselves we cannot stand before him, and yet, in Jesus, we can. I'm just going to finish with this.

[34 : 08] I'd love us to sing one more song. Perhaps Luke, you could come up. It's actually a verse that Luke read earlier. It says, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we may be the righteousness of God.

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we may be the righteousness of God. Friends, we just stand together and just as we finish up, we'll sing one more song.

say, Lord, we know that in ourselves we're not righteous, but we embrace the truth, we embrace the truth that you, Lord, have given us your righteousness.

We reject the lies of the devil, in whatever form they come. We approach you by your grace.

Hallelujah.

Thank you, Lord.