

Saturday 30th May – Ephesians 6:10-20

As we come to the end of our series for ‘Thy Kingdom Come 2020’, today’s offering is a more traditional Bible study. I’ve offered some thoughts, and then finished with two questions for you to consider.

The reading is all about *panoplia*, a word used to mean the full armour of a heavily armoured soldier. However, unlike a Roman soldier, this is armour that is forged and furnished by the Lord of Hosts – the full armour of God!

The Belt of Truth

I’m sure that my belt has shrunk over the last few months! But unlike today, a soldier’s belt actually belong to his underwear rather than his armour proper. However, it was still an essential part of kit, holding together his tunic and bearing his sword, and ensuring that he was unimpeded as he marched.

For the Christian, our belt is truth. The truth of the Gospel is what should sustain us. Knowledge of the truth will enable us to overthrow the devil’s deceits, and so stand firm. But we should also be seen as truthful in all that we do, for our message is not based on deception but integrity and power.

Breastplate of Righteousness

Many commentators find it important that Paul only describes a breastplate, and no backplate. Are we then to face our enemy boldly and not run away? But more than that, this is the breastplate of righteousness. There is no spiritual protection greater than a righteous relationship with God.

That relationship also involves acknowledging that we have not been perfect, and that there are things we need forgiveness for. But the great thing is that God's Righteousness helps us to resist the devil's temptation, so that our life (as far as humanly possible) is righteous.

Boots of the Gospel of Peace

Caliga were leather half-boots, which had a heavy studded sole but left the toes free, and tied up the calves with straps. They equipped the soldier for the long marches he was expected to be prepared for at all times. They were the basic essential, without which a soldier might as well not turn up for duty.

They remind me of the instruction in Exodus 12:11 to eat the Passover lamb stood up and ready to leave. Their obedience was absolute, and the whole of Israel left Egypt the next day full of faith and hope. But are you ready at all times to proclaim the Gospel?

Shield of Faith

Paul here is thinking, not of a small arm shield, but a *scutum*, the large oblong shield which helped to make the Roman legions so invincible. It was also the shield that enabled them to form the *testudo* or tortoise, thus protecting not only themselves but also their fellow soldiers.

Helmet of Salvation

A Roman soldier's helmet was made of tough metals like iron or bronze, with a lining of felt or sponge. Nothing short of a heavy blow from an axe or hammer would be able to pierce it. And some helmets might also have decorations of rank.

The head is a vulnerable spot, a blow there can easily cause dizziness, confusion, concussion or death, none of which are helpful on a battlefield. It doesn't matter whether our understanding of salvation is of what we have already received through God's forgiveness, or confident expectation of full salvation on the last day, true knowledge of God's salvation is an invincible protection against the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Sword of the Spirit

The only offensive part of the armour that Paul mentions is also the last one: it is the *machaira*, the short sword that we see in typical pictures of the Roman legions. It is immediately described as the Word of God, which we might take to mean knowledge of Scripture. Just as a Roman soldier trained daily with their sword, so being familiar with the Word of God is something that takes dedication and regular exposure. Yet when we have it, it provides us with a way to resist temptation (as Jesus did, when tempted in the wilderness) and to bring salvation through evangelism.

Questions

- Is there a piece of armour missing, that you'd like to see included? What might it represent?
- Which piece of armour do you rely on the most? Which is your strongest?