

BATTLE READY CHRISTIANS

“Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” Ephesians 6:10

You are soldiers. But unlike some soldiers who prepare and train and never go into battle, you soldiers of the cross will certainly see battle. The battle is as real as death for death is the enemy. And death cannot be denied. And death I remind you is the result of sin that begins as a disease first to the soul and then the body. “The wages of sin is death”. The world calls death natural but Christians call death the final enemy. We call it the darkness of death.

Christian did you know that you are a soldier engaged in battle? You are! You are engaged in a battle against death and more importantly the causes of death which is sin. All doubts are cleared by reading the epistle and then seeing your bulletin covers. See the helmet, the breastplate, the shield, the sword, and the boots! We can speak of the Word of God bringing light and penetrating the darkness as the sermon hymn does, but the strength of the Word only truly becomes relevant when we see it in the context of the battle between the Kingdom of Light and the Prince of Darkness. In the Christian life, spiritual battle is the focus of our lives. When we are baptized we are received by God into his Kingdom. We enter into the Light. We wear the robes of His righteousness. When we confirm baptism we say with militaristic language for those confirmed praying “may they continue steadfast and victorious to the day when all who have fought the good fight of faith shall receive the crown of righteousness”.

The epistle reading brings clarity to what the purpose of the Christian life really is. We are called to fight with Christ against the darkness standing firm in the Light of the Gospel. We are soldiers called to battle. We are soldiers who learn to fight, not in their own strength but in the strength of Christ. **“Be strong *in the Lord*”.**

Our hymns are full of imagery describing the Christian life as warfare and battle! The choir sang “Be Strong in the Lord” with “the armour of light”. There are many more examples. You know, “Stand up, stand up for Jesus you soldiers of the cross”. You know. “For all the saints who from their labours rest has verse 3 Oh, may thy soldiers, faithful true and bold fight as the saints who nobly fought of old”. And then there are hymns by their very title alone speak of battle “By all your saints in warfare”. Coming up next week will be “A Mighty Fortress is Our God a trusty shield and weapon.” And then there are Easter hymns which speak to our Lord’s miracle in the Gospel reading where the official’s son was at the point of death but is raised up”. We sing, “Jesus Lives! The Victory’s Won”. And these hymns in turn are based on all the Scripture that alludes to the Christian Life as battle. Today’s text to be certain but there is more. Our psalm for today, psalm 8 speaks of stilling the enemy and the avenger. It is a song and a Word.

You are soldiers fighting in battle. But the spiritual battle is a lot like modern warfare. The two armies do not immediately take to the field wearing uniforms dyed in deep reds, blues or greens. It’s more like guerrilla warfare where the enemy stealthfully positions himself and you don’t even see him coming till he strikes the death blow. Therefore the Scripture is replete with

warnings to “Awake”. “Look Up”. “No one knows the day or hour”. And especially 1 Peter 5:6-9) as quoted from the service of compline: “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith”.

St. Paul warns us that the Prince of Darkness is crafty. He desires to blind us to our reality. This is what the phrase “schemes of the devil” refer to. I prefer an older translation “wiles of the devil” simply because it emphasizes the deceitfulness of his plans better. The verse refers to his craftiness.

You are soldiers. The fight is a life and death battle. You fight in the strength of the Lord against the darkness of death and its causes. You are fighting a guerrilla type war. You are also fighting a “total war”. Those who have studied history, even the social studies at the grade 5 level will be familiar with the term “total war”.

The spiritual battle is a lot more like modern warfare in another way. It is total war. In more chivalrous period only the men went to battle. But like modern warfare, the spiritual battles are fought by everyone alike. There are no exceptions. Everyone is a target. Everyone is a soldier. Everyone is armed. Christ the Lord distributes this royal armoury to all alike. And so our Lord desires to cloth his warriors all alike saying “baptize *all nations*”

But soldiers herein is our hope. You are armed and not with primitive weapons. You are armed with the strength of the Lord. You have the whole armour of God.

Fasten upon yourselves the belt of Truth. What a blessing! The world in contrast is in complete confusion. They speak disparagingly of truth as Pilate did “Ah! What is Truth”? But we have a Truth. God created us in His Image. Though we fell into sin, broke his law and his heart he restores that image through the shed blood of Jesus. The blood atones for our sins. It carries away the wrath of His Judgment. He raises us up as surely as he raises up the Lord Jesus. It is a Truth authenticated by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Behold the evidence. The Truth lives!

Put on the breastplate of righteousness. It is not your own but Christ’s righteousness made your own through baptism. His holiness protects us like a space-suit protects an astronaut from the vicissitudes of space. But this holiness is impenetrable!

Put on shoes that give the gift of readiness given by the gospel of peace. Are you ready? People in our society can scarcely say with any confidence that they’re ready for anything. Just listen carefully. How many people have you heard speak with any confidence something expected. How many people can say with any confidence “I’m ready for Christmas” let alone the more difficult commitments saying “I’m ready for marriage” or “I’m ready to die”? But the peace that passes all human understanding that comes with Christ makes us truly ready for anything, anytime and anywhere.

"Therefore I tell you, **do not worry** about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? "Do not worry (Matthew 6:25)

Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, **do not worry** beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. (Mark 13:10)

Every day of our lives is to be a day of preparation. Every day we are prepared. In peace we go forth! Unlike the modern day soldier on the battlefield who honestly does not know the outcome we have confidence in the outcome. We shall be victorious! Christ is risen from the Dead! Christ is victorious! The victory is ours!

Take up the shield of faith. **Now faith** is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. Nevertheless faith, though the results are not yet seen has a foundation. It is founded on the promises of God. And the promises of God are solid as a Rock. Christ has always been true to his word. Even his enemies could not find a lie in him. Their testimony could not agree at his trial. When God promises us the victory we can be certain. Satan is always trying to erode our certainty. He fires off his arrows of doubt. But hold fast the shield of faith by holding onto the sure and certain promises of God. Do not try to rely on feelings of spiritual euphoria that can evaporate as a mist. Hold forth the fact of the resurrection. Hold forth the sure and certain promises of God. This is true faith. This is your shield.

Put on the helmet of salvation. As surely as the pastor anointed your forehead with the sign of the cross saying: "Receive the sign of the cross both upon your forehead and your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ the crucified" you know that no power of evil can touch you. As those in the book of Revelation who were sealed in Christ were safe so shall we be safe. Our salvation is assured.

Finally take up the "Sword of the Spirit" which is the word of God. With this Sword we penetrate the darkness and let in the Light. Be people of the book! Be people in the Word. What is its power? God whose Almighty Word in chaos and darkness heard. Let there be light!

The proclamation of the forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of Jesus is the Light! May we be true soldiers of Christ to wield this Truth as a Sword.

You are soldiers. But unlike most soldiers who train and prepare for battle never knowing the outcome, you know. We might pray "Thy Kingdom come!" but we don't pray as if God is dependent on our prayers. We pray desiring to be part of that certain outcome. May we join the victory.

Amen.