

The Armor of God Pt3 – The Shoes of Preparedness sermonaudio.com

Books of Ezra and Nehemiah

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Bible Text: Nehemiah 4, Ephesians 6:10-18
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 6. We are continuing our study of the book of Nehemiah and the book of Ephesians. We were expositing Ezra-Nehemiah, came to chapter 4, if you weren't with us, and in chapter 4 of Nehemiah the people are building the wall of Jerusalem, they are doing God's work, and to build means that they have to be prepared to fight, that they immediately come under attack or the threat of attack, the enemies of God are plotting to destroy them and to stop the work, and so as we were looking at that, we saw that we build and we fight, that that's the Christian life. We build the people of God, we build one another, we pursue holiness, we pursue likeness to Jesus Christ. That's why we're here, we're to build one another up more and more into the image of Jesus. We're to pursue that ourselves and so that's the work we're called to do, but to do that work is to have to fight. And we noted how the book of Ephesians is parallel to that. It basically describes the same thing, that the building of the temple in Ephesians 2 is a metaphor for the building of the people of God. The church is the temple and that the building of the people of God will result in the need to fight because Ephesians ends with this section we're looking at, Ephesians 6:10-18, and so we began looking at the armor of God. In the same way Nehemiah called the people to take up in one hand the implements for building, the trowel to build the wall, in the same way he called them to take up the trowel in one hand and the sword in the other, we build, we fight, that God calls his people to do the same thing in the New Testament, that we are to build, that we are to be prepared to fight. And so we must take up the armor, take up all the implements that God has called us to and this is what the Apostle Paul helps us with, to see the riches of the armor that we now have on this side of Calvary, this side of the cross, this side of the glorious resurrection of our King Jesus.

So we began looking at the armor so that we could take it up and so we come this morning to the title of the message is "The Armor of God Part 3," and the particular piece of armor we're going to be taking up, talk about taking up today is "The Shoes of Preparedness." The shoes of preparedness. We'll read in the translation I'm reading, the New American Standard, it says to shod your feet with the preparation and I think the word "preparation" better translated into a ready application to us, "preparedness." It's the idea that he's getting at, I think Paul's getting at with this phrase. So we're gonna put on the shoes of preparedness. As we build, we fight, and when you take up the whole armor

of God, we've already seen the need for the belt of truth, the first piece of armor, then the breastplate of righteousness and today the shoes of preparedness.

So let's read Ephesians 6:10-18.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints,

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the perfection of Your word and the sufficiency of Your word, that every passage of Scripture brings to us something that equips us for every good work to make sure that we're thoroughly furnished, that we have everything we need to fulfill the will of God in our lives, to do the good works that you have prepared beforehand that we should walk in. And so this passage brings us to part of that sufficiency and we want to understand, Lord, what it means to shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Lord, we pray that You might give us eyes to see and ears to hear, that You might help us understand and to apply and to obey Your truth, that You might help us understand, to understand this particular aspect is to cling to Christ, to love our Savior more, to rest in His finished work. Speak, Lord, Your servants are listening. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the shoes of preparedness. We need to put on the shoes of preparation or the shoes of preparedness. The other translations the "readiness." The NIV and ESV translate this word "readiness." The King James and New American Standard translate it "preparation." It is an important word. It has the idea of a process of thorough, careful preparation and having done everything, you're fully prepared. It's the word used a number of times in the New Testament often related to like the banquet. Jesus talks about preparing everything for the banquet. Then he's gonna send out people to invite them to the banquet, and this word, when everything is prepared or he uses this word when he tells the disciples to go ahead and prepare the Passover. Get everything ready. So the idea is that the shoes that we put on, the shoes that we're to wear in battle are essentially shoes of this kind of fully preparedness, that we're ready for action, we're ready to move. In fact, the importance of

shoes in the Roman armor, we've talked about this in previous messages, that Paul knew his readers understood the Roman armor, they saw it every day because in their cities in which they lived there were Roman soldiers maintaining order and so they would see the Roman armor. Paul saw it more than anyone as he spent much of his last years of life in Roman prisons, often chained to Roman soldiers.

So they're studying the armor, even as he, you know, just going through his daily routine there is the armor right there in front of him. And we looked at the importance of the belt, the breastplate. We come today to the shoes. The Roman shoes were particularly innovative. In fact, you know, the history of warfare really is the history of technology. When you really read about big movements in history, military history, so often what happens is someone figures out some new and effective way to fight, and the technology of warfare is so important, and in the Roman armor every part of it was just at the very cutting edge of technological innovation, and the shoes were no different. The Roman shoes were a key piece of their success on the military battlefield. The shoes were called the caligae, the Latin c-a-l-i-g-a-e. It was a sandal that was bound to the feet with leather straps around the ankle and even the lower leg. The leather straps were effective and they were comfortable. They didn't restrict the blood flow but they fastened securely this shoe to the foot. Were known for their thick sole. It was a light shoe. It wasn't heavy but it was thick-soled shoe and that allowed them mobility on the battlefield. And one of the ways that sometimes they would try to stop an advancing army was they would bury things underground, some often pointed sticks that were just under the surface so that people, many of the warriors in that day fought barefoot and so they would step on an exposed, you know, a covered right under the surface of the ground a pointed stick, and that would bring a wound to the foot which renders someone incapable of fighting, and if you can't move and you're not, and your base is not strong, you are a sitting duck. And so the Romans had perfected the shoe, this caligae, and it had a thick sole that gave them protection but it also had hobnailed or spiked bottom of the sole. They would put pieces of metal, nail them into the bottom of the sole and it gave them traction, stability.

So it gave them mobility and stability. Those are the two things about the shoe. It made them mobile on the battlefield because one of the things that you do, as I said, you study the history of warfare, one of the key things is always mobility. If you can get around the enemy or you can get to where you can flank them, you can defeat them, and if you can then move to withstand whatever attack is coming, then you can stand up against the enemy. Mobility is critical in battle and then stability is critical. So the grooves on the bottom of the shoes, the spikes enabled them to absorb the blows of someone charging against them and hold their ground. I mean, to lose your footing, have your feet slip out from under you is a death sentence and so the shoes were incredibly important.

Now think about, one thing I want to mention too is, you know, shoes, they don't seem to be that important. Now as I've gotten older, now I'm in my mid-50s, I realized this a few years ago, it took me a long time. I wish somebody had told me, kind of shaken me when I was in my 20s and say, "Listen, there's some things in life that are really important and it just makes common sense." Now I'm telling you, those of you who are young, listen to this, okay? I wish somebody had told me when I was 15 or 20 or even 30 or even 40.

Every step you take, you take on your shoes so you need to have good shoes. This just makes sense. This is why people, you know, working on concrete, that they don't wear the right kind of shoes suddenly they have back problems because your shoes are important, right?

And so that's an area where I thought, "Well, shoes, that's not really..." You know, the clothes make the man so you want to have a nice looking shirt on. Yeah, that's all good, but man, the shoes are important and so in the battlefield. The feet seem kind of like, you know, our feet, we don't see them much, you know, unless you look down at them, right? They're not right there in front of you. When you look in the mirror you don't see your feet. "Am I okay for the day?" So they're out of sight, out of mind. We just don't think about the feet as much but the feet are critical just for life, but in battle the same way. The feet are critical. One other thing while I'm there. A mattress. If you spend a third of your life on a mattress. Now I'm getting no, I'm getting no commissions from any mattress company right now, I can tell you that. But it just made sense and I'm like, "What are we doing skimping on mattresses?" Okay, that's enough. Sorry about that.

It's just common sense applied to life, but the shoes are critical in battle and the Romans saw this and they invested thought, ingenuity and technological effort in perfecting their shoes and this was part of what made them successful because they could move the Roman legion with great speed and alacrity around the battlefield. They see an attack coming, they could move their soldiers quickly into place and then they could stand up against the assault, and God is saying to us, "Listen, this may be something you don't think about but you need to be thinking about the shoes of preparedness." Now we've got to understand what preparedness really means but it's so important to see the shoes and we're gonna see that it really is about mobility and stability.

Let me try to kind of sketch it a little bit for you and then I'll try to show you this is what the text is saying. I think what he's getting at here is that as we, you know, we're talking about, remember we're talking about building, right? We're building with a trowel in one hand and a sword in the other and building, we've said, is any time we're trying to grow in holiness ourselves, we're trying to put off sin, we're trying to grow, we're trying to, you know, to read God's word, to meditate on God's word, to fight against sin in our lives, we're building. When we're trying to have conversations with other people, edifying conversations to build up other believers, we're building. We're taking the trowel and we're talking to someone and often we don't even realize, you know, casual conversation leads into an opportunity to build and so you build. But as you build, remember, you're gonna have to fight. Satan is going to work against all of these different things we're trying to do. In the same way the enemies of Nehemiah had this irrational, seemingly irrational opposition, what do they care that they're building the wall of Jerusalem? But you see, Satan does care. He's opposed to everything good that God is doing and so we must fight.

So you're building and you're fighting and we saw how we have to have the belt of truth, we've got to be submitted to the word of God, we have to have the breastplate of righteousness, we have to be resting confidently in the finished work of Jesus, as we sung

about in that last hymn. The cross of Christ, Jesus made sin for us. Resting in that and then as we are moving toward people to build, we're also going to have, need to have on our shoes. Mobility and stability and I think what this basically has in view is that as we move to address things in people's lives, to help one another, to address things in our own lives, we're going to find that we are attacked at places that we did not expect and therefore we need to be moving on the battlefield.

The attack comes somewhere you were not expecting it and it comes with intensity that you did not anticipate. Maybe you think you're gonna have kind of a, "Yeah, this conversation's not gonna be too bad. I just want to talk to him about this, bring this up." And then suddenly you're experiencing a real intense spiritual attack, so if you don't have your shoes on, you're not able to move to where the battle is raging or you're not able to stand where the battle is raging. So it's about mobility and stability in just the building that we're doing. Unexpected, the attack comes in unexpected places, unexpected ways, unanticipated intensity, and so the shoes help us and what I'm gonna suggest to you that the shoes of preparedness are essentially the peace, a deep, inner, abiding peace that the gospel brings to you and I'm gonna suggest to you that he's not talking about the gospel of peace preparedness to preach the gospel of peace. That's not what he's talking about here. He's talking about the preparedness that comes from you preaching the gospel of peace to yourself.

There are other passages that talk about our need to preach the gospel of peace to the lost but this is talking about the preparedness that comes from preaching the gospel of peace to yourself and your sense of inner confidence and that you, all is well with you and God; that you are right with him; that he is for you, and you knowing that in a deep profound way gives you the ability to move easily on the battlefield. You're not thrown off stride and knocked over by the fact that an attack came somewhere you weren't expecting it because you have the confidence that God, the God of heaven is sovereignly reigning over your life; that he is with you; that he's even planned what's happening; that he's completely in control; that he's for you; that he's blessing you, and therefore whatever happens is like, "Okay, the Lord's got something else for me here. It wasn't what I expected but I'm not thrown off because I know He's in control. And so I'm just going to move now to that area." And I'm able to stand against even a more intense attack because I know he's with me, he's for me, and so it's that preparedness that comes from that understanding of peace. Let me say this: even the word "preparedness" pictures effort, intentional process; that you have to put this on intentionally. It's really true for the whole thing of the armor. Put on the armor of God. You know, take up the armor of God. Take up the whole armor of God.

Now let me just kind of explain why I think it is not the...because you will read some commentators that will talk about it's the preparation to proclaim the good news. Preparing of the gospel of peace. The New American Standard says, "preparation of the gospel of peace," and the King James says the same thing, "preparation of the gospel of peace." The NIV says "the readiness," not preparation, "the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace." The ESV says "the readiness that is given by the gospel of peace." Now what I want you to see is in the Greek it actually says, a more literal translation is what

the New American Standard and the King James say, "the preparation or readiness," you could say readiness is a fine translation of that word, "the readiness of the gospel of peace." Literally that's what the Greek says. The ESV and the NIV are really making an interpretation in their translation. I think they're making, it happens to be but I think they're making the right interpretation in this passage. But this is one of the things, one of the reasons I like the NASB, it tends not to take those liberties. It tends to leave those things ambiguous that are ambiguous in the text. Do you see what I'm talking about? The "of the gospel of peace," they say "given by the gospel of peace," or you know, I forget, the NIV says it in a similar way, "that comes from the gospel of peace."

So now that said, I think they're right in their interpretation. Why? The question is, is it preparation of the gospel of peace, that means that the armor we put on is a preparedness to share the gospel of peace with other people. At first glance it seems to make sense and be a valid possibility, right? I mean, as you're going into warfare, often you're going into warfare with unbelievers and so you need to be ready to share the gospel, but that's not what the text is saying. Why? Well, because all of this armor is defensive armor. The armor is not about you advancing. I mean, the whole point of the passage, four times in the passage, three times you heard it in the English, "stand firm." The goal is to stand firm against an assault against you, so all of the armor is defensive. I think even the sword is defensive though the sword is defensive and offensive because the idea is you take up this armor so that you can stand firm against an attack that is unleashed against you. You're just building. You're minding your own business building the kingdom of God and Satan comes to fight you. You see, we're not actually going around looking for fights like, you know, just trying to find a fight. No, we're trying to build. That's what God has called us to do. But if we're going to build, we have to be prepared to fight so when the fight comes, we have to be prepared.

So the preparation of the gospel, the preparedness is the preparedness that comes from the gospel of peace, the preparedness to stand, and I think when you understand "gospel of peace," how it prepares you to stand, you'll even see that this is the right way to interpret it, but I think just the context tells you that because all of this armor, you know, the belt, the breastplate, now the shoes, the shield, the helmet, and the sword are all given to help you stand firm. So that's why I think it's not about the preparation to preach the gospel of peace. Like I said, there are many passages that say that, that teach that. I remember hearing a guy names Dick Lucas, an Englishman, one time did a superb teaching on expository teaching and preaching. Sometimes the English can be a little more, they're, they have the spiritual gift of sarcasm in a way, but when you say it with an English accent, it just sounds like it's appropriate to be sarcastic. But anyway, this guy, he was a brilliant expositor of Scripture and he was talking about how to exposit the passage and he was talking about, he read a passage to us and he gave us basically an outline that someone had preached and the outline sounded pretty good up front. I mean, I was a seminary student when I heard this. We had driven up from our seminary to Memphis, TN to hear him and James Montgomery Boice who were there at Independent Presbyterian Church in Memphis, TN. It was like 1989, a long time ago, and Dick Lucas in talking about that, he said, "Here's the sermon the guy preached." He said and he read the passage and then he said, "This is the sermon he preached." He gave us the points. He

said that sermon was eminently biblical, it was correct theologically. The only problem was he was preaching something the text was not saying. There are other passages that say that but if you're preaching the text faithfully, you preach what the text says where you are preaching it. Find the right passage if you want to preach that message. I forgot how he said it but like he really, he surprised all of us. He kind of lured us in and we're thinking, "You know, that's a pretty good outline." It was alliterated, sounded good, creative words and stuff but then he like lowered the boom. No, that's not right.

Well, I think this is the case here. It's actually not about the preparation of proclaiming the gospel, that's other places. It's about the preparation, the preparedness, the readiness that comes from abiding in the reality of the gospel that brings peace to the believer. It gives you, then, the mobility to move where the battle is raging to where you may be surprised by an attack. You're not thrown off and it gives you stability to stand up under an even more intense attack than you expected.

So let's then look at this some more. Now the first thing. I want to say one more thing before we get into the outline. There's just two points to the outline today. Last week I realized, somebody commented after the sermon that I didn't have a point. They actually said this, it was graciously said and they were thanking me for the message but they said, "I heard somebody say some time that you preached something today that was really unusual for you. You preached a pointless sermon." Point well taken. So today I've got a couple of points. I felt like I needed to have some points after that.

But before we get to the points, the two points, I want to make a point about the need for preparedness, kind of a preliminary observation. Just the need for preparedness. Now Roman soldiers on the battlefield, you know, they needed to be ready to move so they needed to have all their armor on and their shoes on so that they could move quickly to the place of battle and I want to show you this in Nehemiah 4. This was actually something that we see in our passage in Nehemiah 4, the need for this preparedness, the ability to move to where the battle might show up. Nehemiah 4:16-20.

16 From that day on, half of my servants carried on the work while half of them [and look at all the armor they have] while half of them held the spears, the shields, the bows and the breastplates; and the captains were behind the whole house of Judah. 17 Those who were rebuilding the wall and those who carried burdens took their load with one hand doing the work and the other holding a weapon. 18 As for the builders, each wore his sword girded at his side as he built, while the trumpeter stood near me. 19 I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is great and extensive, and we are separated on the wall far from one another. 20 At whatever place you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

You see, the need to move quickly to the place where the attack comes. It's always essential in warfare and it's just as essential in spiritual warfare, or even more so than in natural warfare.

So that's the need and think about it, how it happens in life because this is true. I mean, just think about how, do you ever feel like you're just kind of minding your own business and a spiritual attack just, wham, just comes? And you think even, "I wasn't even trying to build. I was just minding my own business, having a pleasant day, and wow." Well, you've got to be ready to deal with that, or like I said, maybe you move toward someone and you're having a conversation and you think, "You know, hey, I just want to talk to you about this. It's an observation that I had. Maybe, you know, I don't know, it seems like you've really been struggling with a little bit, you know, depression. Is that right?" And then they just unload on you. You know, "Who are you? What are you saying to me? You're the problem." And suddenly stuff just starts pouring out at you that you didn't know was gonna come.

So what's happened is that's like an attack, a spiritual attack. Now the person is not your enemy. Remember, the person you're talking to is never your enemy. We read this in Ephesians 6, our struggle is not with flesh and blood, but the spiritual attack behind it often the flesh, the world, the devil, are cooperating together to bring an attack. And so how do you manage to not get thrown off your footing, how do you manage to move to where the battle's raging? Or sometimes it's happened to me a number of times is I'm gonna talk to somebody, maybe a counseling session, and I have a plan of what I want to talk about and I think I know the situation, the particular need that needs to be addressed, and then things come up and we're dealing with stuff that I never planned to deal with. "I wasn't expecting this." And it can be very discouraging. It can really trip us up if you don't have on your shoes of preparedness. If you haven't shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, you will get messed up by that. You know, when things just kind of go chaotic in your life, another way it happens, isn't it funny how sometimes, you know, things are, it's even worse when you expect it's gonna be a peaceful time. You've gotten through a lot of stuff and it's like now, "Hey, I think this is gonna be a night where we're gonna get home and it's gonna be calm," and it's like bam, bam, explosion, explosion, explosion, mines going off, and you find yourself running from crisis to crisis and emotionally you're undone, you're just kind of, and you're no, you're of no good for the kingdom because you weren't prepared. That's what this is talking about. The shoes of preparedness that come from the gospel of peace, and if you have your shoes on, if you've shod your feet correctly with the gospel of peace, you will have a mobility to move to the new thing that's coming up with confidence, you'll have stability to be able to stand, and that will make you of great good in the same way a soldier who's properly shod on his feet is able to move and to defend the calls of his General.

Okay, now here let's get into the outline. Two points. The first point is the gospel brings peace. The gospel brings peace. It's essentially what we have here in the text is the gospel of peace, the gospel that brings peace, the gospel, the good news of peace. And so it is the good news and the gospel is in the Greek literally the word means "good news; good announcement; good proclamation." It's the authoritative proclamation of good tidings and so the gospel is the fact that God has appointed his people to announce good tidings that God has made a way for sinners who were at war with him to be brought to peace; to

end the conflict between me and God and between you and God, God has brought the gospel. It is the good news, essentially the gospel is Jesus Christ. He is the good news. Everything about Christ that he has done is the good news, the fact that he has taken our sin upon himself, and this actually kind of flows out of the breastplate of righteousness we talked about last week. Remember, we talked about the active and passive righteousness of Christ, how he fulfilled the law completely. He took away all of the wrath against you. All of it taken away forever if you have repented and placed your faith in him. He gives you his righteousness so that you now are accepted in the Beloved. God sees you the way he sees Jesus. God loves you the way he loves Jesus. God wants to bless you the way he wants to bless Jesus. That's essentially gonna lead and if you can wrap your head around that more and I can do that, and we can walk in conscious reliance upon that reality, we're putting our shoes on. We're wearing the shoes of preparedness. We're ready for whatever comes.

The gospel brings peace. Look with me at Romans 5, just a couple of verses here. How does the gospel bring peace? Well, let's look at actually at start at the last verse of chapter 4. Speaking of the Lord Jesus, Paul says, this is Romans 4:25, Paul says, "He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." So there's the cross. He was delivered over, given up by the Father, turned over to experience the wrath of God, to experience the judgment. He was turned over, in a sense, to the executioner for all of the punishment that should come upon us for our transgressions. Delivered over for our transgressions. Raised because of our justification. His resurrection shows us his perfect righteousness and therefore imputes it to our account. Our sin imputed to Christ. His righteousness imputed to us. Chapter 5, verse 1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This concept of peace is something that is such an important biblical word and concept that we tend to just like so many things, we have kind of a lightened view of it. It's part of just living in a fallen world but the idea of peace in the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "shalom." You'll maybe hear Jewish people sometimes greet one another, "Shalom." It means "peace." The shalom of God is essentially the essence of salvation. It means the absence of conflict, that's what peace means, right? War/peace, right? But it means the absence of conflict but it means so much more. The shalom of God means the absence of conflict and the wholeness and complete sense of well-being that then follow. It's wholeness, completeness, things are as they ought to be. There's complete sense of confidence and well-being. That's the shalom.

So when it said Jesus is the Prince of Peace, when Isaiah prophesied in chapter 9 that there would be a Son given who would be Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, he is the one who will bring peace. He will bring God's shalom. God is announcing shalom, peace, and he's bringing it through his Son, the Prince of Peace, the one who as Paul says in Ephesians 2:11, "He Himself is our peace." Jesus is our peace. He is our shalom; that to come to Christ to, as Paul says in Romans 5:1, to have been justified by faith is to come into the shalom of God. It is to have peace with God.

And he goes on in verse 2 to say, it's to have obtained introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand. You've obtained introduction. You've been brought into grace in which you stand. Grace means "the delighted favor of God." The word "charis" is related to joy and it means "that which gives delight," and it's freely given, yes, grace is not earned, it's given, it's a gift, but to be, to stand in grace means to stand in the place of God's favor and delight. You have now because you have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you've been justified. Your sins are taken out of the way and you now stand in his complete loving favor and delight. He sings over you, as Ted mentioned earlier. He sings over you as he prophesied in the prophet. He delights in his people and if you can come to really believe that in a practical way on a daily moment-by-moment basis, you will be wearing the shoes of peace and you will be a more effective soldier in the army of Christ.

This is so critical but it's because of what Jesus has done. We repent, we place our faith in Christ, we believe what he's done for us, we know that we are filthy, we're hopeless, there's nothing in me, there will never be anything in me that could possibly merit any mercy from God and yet there is everything in Jesus. Everything in Christ. He's taken my sin out of the way. He's given me righteousness and by faith now I stand at peace with God in the shalom of God and in the absolute loving favor of God, and because of that, I can face whatever comes.

It's interesting if you follow the logic in Paul even in Romans 5. While we're here, just look at this. He says, look at verse 1, he said, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." Verse 2, "we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand." We're standing in grace and we exult in the hope of the glory of God. He's basically saying you're in the shalom of God and all that awaits you is the glory of God to come. You're gonna go from the most awesome place any human being has ever been, to an even more awesome place. This is your path. Here's God's plan for you: awesomeness to more awesomeness. That's it. That's what he's saying and if you believe that, it changes everything.

Look what he says next in verse 3, "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations." How can that be? Because for the Christian tribulation takes you into more and more of God's blessing and favor. They're actually perfectly planned and prescribed to bring you more and more of God's peace and enjoyment of his favor and grace.

"And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit." Even our suffering, whatever happens, whatever comes at you – now think about this – whatever comes at you even if what comes at you is what you most fear, think about what you most fear, if you're in Christ and that happens to you, it will be because God is going to pour out blessings upon you you cannot imagine. The word of God promises you that.

This is why we need no fear. You know that phrase "no fear," people like to throw it around, people act like they don't fear but every unbeliever fears. They know there's a God and they know they're going to be apart from him in eternity whether they acknowledge it consciously with their mouth or not. They know it according to Romans 1, they know they're without excuse. But for the Christian, there really need be no fear. In fact, if you fear God, you need fear nothing else. Someone has said that. If you fear God, you need to fear nothing else. If you truly fear God, you need to fear nothing.

1 John 4:18, perfect love casts out fear. If you are loved perfectly, you need not fear anything. If God who knows everything about you knows everything that he's trying to do in your life, he's only wanting to bless you because you're in Jesus. Remember how we talked about last week, how he so delighted in Christ that he spoke out of heaven twice, three times audibly but twice he said the same thing, "This is My Son whom I love, with whom I am well-pleased," as if he couldn't contain himself, as it were. I mean, he so delighted in Jesus and what Jesus is and what he's doing. He speaks that way. He can't contain it. He just loves him so much. He now loves you that way if you're in Christ. Not because of who you and I are but because of who Jesus is, and the fact that Jesus is who he is and he's done what he has done means that God's love for you is secured forever. Nothing can separate you from that love. And if that's the case, truly everything in your life he is preparing, in fact, it's interesting this word "prepared," to have your heart prepared, it occurs one other time in the book of Ephesians. Ephesians 2:10. After he talks about our being justified by faith, grace through faith, he says in Ephesians 2:10, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." So that we would walk in them.

Now let's go ahead and move to the second point. The gospel brings peace. The gospel brings us favor. That's actually, Ephesians 2:10 is more my next point so we're gonna move to the next point. The second point is, first the gospel brings peace, peace brings preparedness. Peace brings preparedness. This is the logic of the apostle in shodding your feet with the preparation, the preparedness that comes from the gospel that gives peace. Peace brings preparedness or peace makes you prepared. Truly understanding the peace of God makes you prepared.

Back to Ephesians 2:10 now. So he says, "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." What he's saying is he saved you and he has mapped out every detail of your life. He's prepared beforehand. He's done the same thing of preparation, this process of preparation, the careful, like think about you're gonna have a party with a lot of people coming and you're trying to get every detail down and you're thinking, "Do I have the candles for the cake? Have we got the cake ordered? Have we got the salad stuff ready? Have we got all the different things that go together? Have we got the drinks? Have we got the ice? Have we got everything? Who's coming? Are the invitations out?" All of that, you get all of it done and that day you're set and you're prepared now for the guests to come. That sense of preparedness, that sense of preparation that goes in, that's what we're supposed to have in our lives and that is what God has already done. That's what he's saying in Ephesians 2:10. God has already done all of that for every moment of every day of your life.

Think about, you know, say it's your, this is not a worthy illustration but let's go there for a moment here. You have a special birthday, someone you love, and you prepare, you decide it's like a big birthday, you know, it's one of the new decade things, right? 40, 50, 60, 70, 75. After you get to certain decades, you start getting halfway points, I guess, get celebrated too. But anyway, 80, 90, 100. So you're preparing for your spouse or your sibling or dear friend and you really want to map out the day to spend the day with them and you plan everything. You don't tell them anything. Hey, listen, you just get up and we're gonna start at 8 AM, come downstairs dressed, dressed like this, you know? They come down, they have no idea what's gonna happen. You're the birthday person now. You've got no idea what's gonna happen. You come down and you just know, though, that somebody who loves you has planned a wonderful day for you and if you know that they love you, and if you know they're pretty good at planning, you're gonna have a great day. It's possible sometimes some of us aren't so great. I know I've made plans that Patti probably thought, "Wish my husband was a little better at planning." Right? But no, imagine though the person planning for you is skilled and wise and really loves you, and so they thought ahead to what your favorite breakfast is and they've already planned either to make it or to take you to the favorite breakfast place. So you get in the car and you go to the favorite breakfast place. You get out, you're like, "Oh, it's so awesome. This is a great start." Then they, whatever activity they plan is like the perfect activity. "We're gonna go somewhere. I know you've been wanting," but they don't tell you until you get there. And you start driving and you start figuring out, "Oh, I know where we're going. This is awesome." And then lunch, you know, birthdays should have three good meals, I think, don't you? The three perfect meals on your birthday. Anyway, so the lunch is gonna be perfect and then the afternoon activities and then dinner is gonna be perfect, and then the evening activity. Everything that you wanted that is perfect, it's gonna happen that way. Isn't that an awesome birthday?

Now if you and I had eyes to see correctly, if we could see reality, it's not pie in the sky, this is reality. If you and I could see what is really happening in the life of the Christian, it is just what I described. Every moment of every day exactly what makes you more like Jesus and gives you more life and more blessing. That is what your loving Father is doing for you every moment of every day. Do you believe that?

What are you afraid of? What am I afraid of? And truly what are you afraid of? What do you fear most? Think about that. Let the Lord search your heart. It may come to you right away. You may know exactly what you fear most, and some of you may have been suppressing it so much that you have to think about it a little more. What do you fear most? Now apply the theology of the Bible to that. If what I fear most happens to me tomorrow, it is a part of my loving Father's desire to abundantly bless me. He knows best. He's taking me into, if that happens, what I fear most so that he can delight my heart and he can sing over me with me. It may take a while until I see it. It may be painful. It is. So often we go into it and we don't feel immediately like we're on the birthday party, do we? We feel like all hell has broken loose in our lives sometimes and we don't know what is happening but in those moments if we will keep anchored to who we are in Christ, if we will preach the gospel to ourselves every day, this is who I am not because of who I am

but because of what Jesus has done, God is at peace with me, he's not out to get me. Even if I sin and need to be disciplined, his discipline will be measured and perfect to produce righteousness so I don't even need to fear, I don't even need to have a slavish fear of disobeying him. Now a respectful healthy fear but it's not like I don't want to please him. I don't want to disobey the Lord but if I do, I know he'll lovingly bring me back into line. Now don't presume on that, you know, love him and don't walk in disobedience but even, to not even worry about if you were to slip and you lose your mind temporarily, whatever it is, whatever you fear most, you can be set free from that by understanding the love of Christ and the love of God for you in Christ. He loves you perfectly. He will only bless you.

I mean, I remember a while back I had an experience of this, this is just a little example of how you can apply this, not a super big one but there was a time where I was, I had this irrational fear come over me. I'm not one that's really disposed to that and I struggle with other sins, not usually fear. But I mean, sure I struggle with fear in different ways but I'm talking about like fear like this. It was an irrational fear of backing over someone or hitting someone with my car. Some of you may have had this. It happened after I heard about was it Steven Curtis Chapman's little boy? He backed over and I have an SUV and I'm thinking, "Boy, it would be easy to do that." Don't have the camera. I love the camera in back now. That's a great idea. I don't have one, though. But anyway, so you pray for me that I don't have a camera. But no, I started actually thinking about that and so I got a little bit, I kind of got a little OCD, compulsive about looking behind the car more than necessary. Not, you know, this didn't last a real long time. It was a pretty short-lived thing for me in this particular case. Some of you, it's a bigger issue and I have my big issues. This normally isn't a big one but this was one that the Lord allowed me to have which kind of surprised me. It was one of these surprising attacks. Wow, didn't expect it. And I started thinking even about, it made me start thinking about, "Well, if I'm driving down the road and I lose focus for a minute, I could hit somebody in my car and I could go, you know, that would be terrible." How often would it be, awful it would be to be responsible for the death of someone because you were careless. I don't know if I could live with that.

Now think about that, what I just said. Are the promises of God true? Are not all the promises of God yes and amen in Christ Jesus? So I'm supposed to be careful. It's appropriate to take appropriate precaution and look behind you before you back up. It's appropriate to be careful when you're driving to be focused, absolutely, but I know there are moments and I thought about this, there are moments where I have not been as focused as I should have been and I could've hit somebody if I was, if I had looked away at the wrong time, reached to get my phone off the floor back before when you could touch your phone, remember? I mean, you know, make calls and stuff in the car. There was one time when I reached below the seat to grab my phone and I looked up and I actually hit a car from behind. Thankfully, nobody was hurt. I thought that could happen, that's happened more than just that one time. I've been looking, not distracted.

So I really was wrestling. This was about a three or four week process and the Lord just reminded me to just kind of think about the promises of God and to face my fear. And so

what I did was I started applying it. Okay, if what I fear most happened, if I backed over, you know, a family member or if I backed over a stranger, it could only happen because God allowed it to happen. I might be responsible. I might be guilty of vehicular homicide in which case I would need to go to jail, but that could only happen if my God who loves me in Christ perfectly is at peace with me, if he had prepared beforehand the good work of going to prison and glorifying him there. And if he's prepared that work for me, he will equip me and enable me to walk in that obediently, and I'm gonna have a good prison ministry apparently, Lord. And I could be abused by people in prison, and if that's the case, then he's gonna give me grace to walk with Christ and understand more of the sufferings of Jesus in that and love him more, and he will help me deal with that because he loves me perfectly.

And it just took the teeth out of that fear, like, "Yeah, that's right." I want to be careful and I'm more careful than I was before I had that fear but the Lord delivered me from that particular one, but there's still so many things where you and I are afraid of things that are keeping us from being effective for God and if we really believe what we say we believe and we do the hard work, the mental meditation on the Scriptures, the pondering of things like that, that was basically me meditating and praying through something. What happens if this happens? This means that God would have allowed that to happen. Well, what if I was wrong, I really was negligent? Well, that would mean God allowed me to be negligent and it would at the same time mean I probably would deserve to go to jail. Yes, it does but that God allowed that to happen because I could've been negligent and nobody was there when I swerved into the lane. Nobody's there, there's no harm, but the Lord had to allow that person to be there at that moment therefore I know God has ordained that, and if God has prepared that work, he's gonna give me the grace and therefore I can walk through every day like that person whose birthday party. It's my birthday. Everything that God has for me is gonna be great eventually. I mean, it's really great at the moment, I just don't see it fully.

And when you have that, now think about you're building. You're going to have a conversation with somebody that you care about and you think there's an issue here and you're gonna talk to them and suddenly they come up with stuff and they start telling you stuff, I mean, you know, they tell you, they call into question all kinds of things about your character and it's just an all-out attack on you. A person who is living in fear of what men say and doesn't really understand that God is in control is going to be thrown off by that, but the man or woman, the boy or girl, the young man, young woman, who knows that their God is at peace with them, that they are abiding in his shalom, his complete favor, that person sees it differently. It's not pleasant. "Oh my goodness, what's happening here? This person's attacking me. This person, I never expected this. Wait a minute. Lord, what have You got for me? What are You doing in this situation?"

This is really related to the concept of meekness. The word "meekness" is not in the text but I think it's the same idea under the term "meekness." And I was thinking about this as I was preparing this week, meekness, the quality that Jesus exhibits and that we're to exhibit, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth," meekness is an outward gentleness so that when people come and say harsh things to you or attack you, there's a

basic gentleness of response. That's the outside of meekness but the inside of meekness, what meekness flows from is a confidence and one of the word study books I have says it this way, that it is the confident assurance that whatever God does in my life is right and I will not dispute against it. So when someone comes and they come and they attack you in some way, you're not just thinking about the person, you're not even just thinking about the spiritual enemy, you're putting it in context of who God is. "God is allowing this spiritual attack to happen to me so, Lord, what have You got for me? What do You want to accomplish in my life?" And it changes, it changes everything. There's a surrendered heart that then now I'm able to get on God's agenda. "What is it You want me to do in response to this? I'm supposed to be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger." Scripture starts coming to mind. Let me listen. "Hey, you're really upset. I can see you're really upset and that concerns me. I really want to understand." Rather than, "What are you doing!" That's the flesh, right? "Who do you think you are?"

No, the Christian who knows God's in control, this is something the Lord has brought to me. It's not just you and I know there's a lot of sin in that probably, coming in that kind of tone or whatever, but I'm not so concerned about that right off, I'm concerned about putting myself rightly related to my God who's working in my life. "Lord, what are You doing here? What do You want me to do?" And so now a gentle answer turns away wrath and now suddenly you have withstood the initial attack because you are wearing your shoes of peace and you're able, then, after you've stood the initial attack, you even know that the attack is really over here. You're able to move with grace to the place now of what God wants me to do.

You see clearly. It's something that the Christian has this amazing thing. First of all, it's interesting that we put on the shoes of peace, the shoes of preparedness of peace to fight. Christian life is a paradox. We preach peace and it brings about a fight. That's just the Christian life. But you abide in peace, you walk in peace and you are a mighty warrior in the hand of God. You become much more effective as a soldier of Jesus Christ. You can, and then the joy that comes when you realize that you're standing because he's given you this confidence. When you know that he really is for you, if God is for you who can be against you? Paul works this out in Romans 8:1, "There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ." 8:28, meditate on 8:28-39 this week, Romans 8:28-39, thinking about what this means, that whatever comes, tribulation, peril, famine, nakedness, sword, whatever comes because God has told us that we're like sheep, we're here to be slaughtered, that he's gonna allow us in this world to experience suffering and yet all of that is truly because he's blessing us and loving us and giving us the most precious treasure in the world which is more and more knowledge, experiential knowledge of Jesus, and more and more likeness to Christ.

So if you embrace God's purpose to make you like Jesus and you embrace the fact that God knows what is right and good and best and you don't, and you walk in that and you know his purpose is only to do what is good and right and best, nothing can stop you. Nothing can throw you off. The power of Christ will be made known in us when we're doing that. The shoes of preparation of the gospel of peace, the preparedness that comes

and then we're able to do good to those who come against us. You're able to return love, good for evil, love for hatred because of who you are in Christ.

This is a day that we need that. There's so much venom and hatred in our society around everything. Corona virus. All the tensions in government and politics. We as Christians, we need to know, "Hey, the Lord ordained for us to live in this time." This is our birthday party. This is what God gave to you. When he decided to make you and to place you and make you born at the time you were born, this was part of his plan for you in Christ. Rejoice in it and be glad and know that it's better than any other thing that you could have had, otherwise it wouldn't be this way. That's who we are because of what Jesus has done for us.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for the gospel, the good news that You have made a way to show lovingkindness and compassion to people who were enemies and under wrath, rightly under wrath where we deserve Your judgment forever and You've shown favor to us in Jesus. Lord, help us, give us faith, give us greater understanding of the richness of Your promises and the beauty of Your ways. You do all things well. You plan the best. You prepare the best. Everything You do is the best. You never have any thoughts of, "I wish I could've done it a little better." No, it's always perfect. Give us faith to believe that and to rest in that and to walk in the joy of that and give us more and more desire for what truly is best, that is more love for Jesus and more likeness to Jesus. Have Your way in Your people, Lord. We pray in His name. Amen.