

The Armor of God Pt 6 - The Sword of the Spirit

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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, the sixth chapter of Ephesians. We come this morning to the sixth piece of armor in the armor of God. Always wonderful to gather together with God's people around God's word, and it is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. I do need to ask you to just celebrate with me. Today I've been married to Patti for 34 years. [applause] You know, so grateful for God's kindness and mercy in giving me a woman way beyond what I deserve.

We come this morning to the sixth piece of the armor of God, the sword of the Spirit, and we've noted that as we've looked at this, that we remembered we're talking about the armor of God because as we were working through the books of Ezra-Nehemiah, seeing that we're called as Christians today to build the walls of Jerusalem, for us today the application is to build the body of Christ, to build up one another in our most holy faith, to encourage one another in the things of God, to help one another, edify one another in our love for Christ, our pursuit of God's glory and holiness, and as we do that, we find the same thing that happened to the people in Nehemiah's day. As they sought to build the walls of Jerusalem, they came under attack because the enemy of our souls hates God and he hates the kingdom of God and he hates the advancement of the kingdom of God, and so he always opposes it. And so we saw that to fight, I mean to build is to be required to fight. We build, we fight. We said that Ephesians is basically the same kind of flow in the book of Ephesians and I've shared that with you a number of times, I'm not gonna go through it again, just to remind you, though, that to be about the business of God, to have become a believer in Jesus Christ, to have repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, to have been born again to a living hope is to now be about building the kingdom of God, and to have become a child of God, you have become the sworn enemy of hell and the sworn enemy of Satan. And so there is no choice for the Christian but to be prepared to fight and that's why the Apostle Paul echoes what we saw in Nehemiah 4, that we're to take up the implement of building, the trowel and the sword in Nehemiah 4. One hand with the weapon and one hand with the implement of building. That's how we are to go about our lives. So the Apostle Paul in encouraging us to build one another up, he at the end of his letter gives us this section of Scripture which tells us we must be ready for the spiritual fight that will certainly await us.

So we come this morning to the sixth implement. So the title of the message is "The Armor of God – The Sword of the Spirit." The armor of God, the sword of the Spirit, and we read again from 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, as we bow before You, we acknowledge that You are the author of life, the sustainer of all that exists. Lord, You give us every breath that we take. You hold every detail of our future in Your sovereign hand. You are working whatsoever comes to pass, whatever happens comes by result of Your decree, Your foreordination, Your predestination, that Your people might be made more and more like Jesus; that those who belong to You might be built up in their knowledge of Christ. And so as we sung about, Lord, when we encounter fiery trials, the truth is that You only design those to accomplish Your purpose, to consume the dross and to refine the gold of our faith, and so we come praising You, worshiping You, but asking You and entreating You, Lord, that You might give us Your grace this morning to understand Your word, that You might work, Holy Spirit, by Your power in our hearts and You might take this sword and use it today to accomplish Your purposes in our lives and that You might deal with our sin, confront, expose every part of our hearts that tends to harbor that which is not pleasing to You, and You might cut it out and You might grant by Your grace more repentance and more faith in Christ. Have Your way in this time, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the armor of God, the sword of the Spirit. We're going to look this morning at this sixth, final piece of armor in the description that Paul gives here in Ephesians 6. We've noted that he is apparently drawing on two basic backgrounds. One is the very obvious experience of everyday life for the Ephesians to whom he writes, and indeed for every person in the Roman Empire, and certainly for Paul himself. They saw Roman soldiers every day, they were familiar with the breastplate, and the belt, and the sword, and the shoes, and the helmet, and the shield of the Romans soldiers, and so this was a very familiar, very accessible metaphor, and he also draws on the rich teachings of the Old

Testament, particularly the book of Isaiah where God depicts himself as coming and bringing the armor. I think it's a prophecy of Jesus who comes in the armor of God as the divine warrior to defeat Satan. And so he's drawing on that imagery of the Old Testament, he's drawing on the very near and obvious reference in the minds of his readers to the Roman soldier when he talks about these essential pieces of armor and he comes today, we come today to the sixth piece of armor, the sword of the Spirit. We're to take up the whole armor of God. All of it. Not most of it, but all of it. And we're to remember they were fighting a spiritual war. These are not weapons to be used against people as we read, our struggle is not against flesh and blood but is against principalities, powers, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

So it's a spiritual war and we have spiritual weapons, and so this morning the sword of the Spirit. May God help us take up the sword of the Spirit. So we're gonna organize our message the way we have the last several, which is around the questions, the three questions and the first question is: what is the sword of the Spirit? That's our first point this morning, what is the sword of the Spirit? The question always seemed more urgent on the first five pieces of armor. Now think about that. If you're listening, what is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God? Every time we've asked that question, what is the belt of truth, what is the breastplate of righteous, what are the shoes of preparedness, what is the shield of faith, what is the helmet of salvation, we had a pretty good idea based on the words in the text but we had to do some sanctified reasoning and some letting Scripture interpret Scripture to really tell us what precisely is the shield of faith, what precisely is the helmet of salvation, what precisely is the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth? And so we looked at that and we did some good necessary inferences to come to some clarity on those things. Today in one sense this question could just be, "it's the word of God," point 2, but I think we need to unpack it a little more than that, but he does say it emphatically. It's explicit. It's not implicit here, it's explicit. What is the sword of the Spirit? It's given there in the relative clause, "which is the word of God. Let there be no mistake," Paul says, "the sword of the Spirit is the word of God." And the way in which Paul gives emphasis to this by being explicit about it, is instructive. This piece of armor of God, the sword of the Spirit, Scripture is of the highest priority. He wants no mistake about this.

As we continue to think about the sword of the Spirit, what is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, let's think about what he's communicating here by, first of all, considering, A., the practical importance of the sword. That's what we've done with each piece of armor, thought about its practical importance. The Greek word translated "sword" is the word "machaira." This word refers to a short sword, the short sword. It's the Roman soldier's short sword that was used by the Roman foot soldier. In Latin, the language of Rome, it's the word "gladius." That's the sword. It's not the longer sword, the spatha. No, that's a four foot long sword that's used by cavalry mostly. This is the short sword used by the Roman foot soldier, the gladius. In Greek, machaira.

The sword was 24 inches long, about 2 feet long in total, 18 inch long blade. So 6 inch long handle. The breadth of the sword would be about 2 inches or a little less than 2 inches. Not a super-broad sword. The thickness was less than ¼ inch, the thickness of the

blade itself. Usually about 3/16 of an inch. This 18 inch blade was sharpened on both sides and it was also, the point of the blade, the point of the gladius was also sharpened to a fine point so that it had a tapered edge which sometimes weapon experts call a bullet point, tapered to a fine point so that this weapon was as one of the historians I read said, one of the finest close-quarter weapons ever devised because it was adept for use in stabbing your opponent. And because of the two edges and the bullet point, it was very effective even at piercing armor. So in hand-to-hand combat you can see the Roman soldier, his helmet on, his shield protecting him from the blows of the enemy, and he stabs the opponent with that machaira, that gladius, and a wound in the torso was almost always fatal. Because it was two edged, it was especially adept at penetrating but also it was also an excellent slashing weapon because it's two edged. One of the ways it would be used was the soldier holding his shield would sometimes go below the other person's shield to slash their legs. It was outstanding stabbing and slashing weapon used in close-quarters, hand-to-hand combat.

So there was nothing more important to the Roman soldier than his sword. I mean, every piece of weaponry was essential. No soldier wanted to go without his helmet. No soldier wanted to go without his shield certainly. But certainly one thing he was not going to forget is the sword. He carefully looked after his sword. He sharpened the blade regularly. He wiped and cleaned it so there would be no decay in the metal. It had to be strong enough to be a defensive weapon to lift up against the sword attacks of his enemy, to stop those with the sword, and it had to be sharp enough to be able to be used to effect when he stabbed or when he slashed. His life depended on the quality of his sword.

That's the practical importance of the sword, let's think about the spiritual significance of the sword and we know the sword is the word of God. We could say if it's true that the gladius was one of the finest close-quarter weapons ever devised, there has been no spiritual weapon ever devised better than the word of God for close-quarter conflict, for hand-to-hand, life and death spiritual struggles, there is nothing like the word of God. In fact, the author of Hebrews uses that same word, the same Greek word for the short sword, machaira, in a very familiar passage, Hebrews 4:12 where he says, "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword," that's machaira, the gladius, "the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." You can see how powerful this defensive weapon, it's also an offensive weapon. That's the beauty of the sword. Practically speaking and spiritually, it's both defensive and offensive.

So Hebrews 4, nothing neutralizes our spiritual enemies like the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. It's important for us to take a moment to talk about the phrase "word of God" here. The word, the English word "word," w-o-r-d, translates here the Greek word "rhema." There are two primary words in Greek that are translated into English with the English word w-o-r-d, and it's the word "word." It sounds like I'm stuttering, doesn't it? The word "word" here, "Ah, he's got a stuttering problem." No, the word "word" here is the word "rhema." It's normally "logos." That's by far the more common Greek word translated into English with w-o-r-d, logos or logos sometimes

you'll hear it pronounced. That's the word that is normally used. Here Paul uses the word "rhema" and it's a word that's used 68 times in the New Testament. It's not used rarely but it's not used nearly as much as "logos." And when you look at it, there's some overlap, sometimes the words are used synonymously but there tends to be a semantic range. You know, words tend to, we use words like this. If you think about here's the range of meaning of this word, the range of meaning of that word, a lot of times you'll have overlap like this. Sometimes they're used the same way, right? And sometimes "rhema" is used the same way "logos" is, but then there are other times where "rhema" is used because there is a different nuance to the word "rhema," and "rhema" comes from the Greek verb "rheo" which means "to utter; to pour forth," and the idea is the "rhema" strictly speaking is that which is uttered, that which is spoken. It's more, it's less about the content initially, it's more about the utterance, the actual act of speaking. It is about the content so don't misunderstand me, but it's about the particular utterance. So you'll find it used as individual words or phrases. "Logos" when compared this way with "rhema, logos" tends to be the word of God in general. Now it's not always but the word of God in general is more related to the range of meaning of "logos. Rhema" is more about particular verses and specific phrases or passages.

So when he says the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God, he's talking about particular texts, specific verses. It's still the word of God, it's the Bible, it's not something else. It's not like you'll hear charismatics talk about rhema, watch out. They don't know what they're talking about. Like you can get new words given to you or that you read the Bible, something magical happens. No, it's taking the text of Scripture but the way the Scripture uses it, is "rhema" is more about the individual verses correctly interpreted and rightly expounded and spoken, that's a sword. That's the sword of the Spirit.

I'll give you an example of how it's used, a couple of places in Matthew. Matthew 12:36, "we will give account for every idle word," that's "rhema." Every single specific word, you see, that which is spoken. Matthew 26:75, when Peter heard the rooster crow, he remembered the word of Jesus. Not the word in general. What did he remember? He remembered the word when Jesus had said, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." The specific word came to mind. That's the idea here.

So the sword of the Spirit is a particular verse, a specific text that is spoken in the moment at the right point, at the point initially of attack. You're attacked, the enemy comes at you and the word is that which you bring to combat the attack, and which is not only defensive but turns out to be offensive in driving the enemy away. This is the idea of resisting the devil and he will flee from you. If you resist him, resisting him means having on all of the armor. Yes, it does, but it also means not just having on all the armor and not using your sword. It means have all of your armor on and use your sword and the sword is a particular verse, a specific text spoken in the moment, accurately applied, is like the thrust of a sword into the side of our spiritual enemy. That's what is the sword of the Spirit. That's the first point.

Secondly, why do we need it? Second point, why do we need the sword of the Spirit? One of the commentators I read made an interesting observation. William Hendriksen in

his commentary on Ephesians said that Paul gives primary placement to the sword and there's a sense in which there's a real logical flow to the list except this actually doesn't fit the logical flow, and that's because Paul's emphasizing it. Let me explain what he's talking about. Hendrickson points out, which I've mentioned a while back, all the commentators note that the first three pieces of armor are things that you attach to yourself and the verbs that are used speak of that, right? You gird your loins with truth. You gird yourself with the belt of truth. You put on the belt, attach it. You put on the breastplate of righteousness. It's attached to the belt. It's attached to the chest. It's tied around the shoulders. You tie up your feet, you bind up your feet with the shoes of preparedness, and these things happen really almost like getting out of bed, getting ready for the day, you do these things as a Roman soldier. But then when the alarm comes, when the battle comes, now the verbs change, you take up.

Now think about it, this is where he points out. He says think about how you would take up things as the battle comes. The first thing you would normally expect to take up would be your helmet. Not your shield. Why the shield first? I mean, the shield's heavy. Get the helmet on, get your helmet on before you take up the shield. He points out the logic really seems to be the Roman soldier would put on his helmet, his sword, and then his shield. Now I'm ready to pick up this heavy thing because I've got my sword, I've got my helmet on. I mean, I'm gonna pick up my shield and now I put my helmet on with one hand. So let's put my helmet on with two hands, grab the sword, grab the shield, now we're going. I think that makes sense. What he points out is shield would normally be at the end but he puts it fourth because he wants the sword of the Spirit to have the primary place, the climactic place in the list. What you need as much as anything, indeed more than everything else really, is the word of God. If you have the word of God, you have all that you need. That's what Paul is saying.

So the placement in the list calls out its importance. We need it because God put it in the list and then he put it at the top of the list, as it were, by putting it last, building to the most important. But we also need it not just because of its placement in the list, you could say 2B is because of the preeminent example that we have in Scripture. The preeminent example that we have in Scripture. Turn with me to Matthew 4. You find this account also in Luke's Gospel, Luke 4, but we're gonna look at Matthew 4. What we see here is the Lord Jesus Christ in spiritual warfare with Satan himself. The Lord Jesus Christ is attacked by Satan. He's led into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tempted by the devil, to be under spiritual assault from the devil for 40 days as he fasts. There's a lot going on here. I think this is one of the places where if you think about this, there's so much beauty. The way Scripture fits together like this is just mind-blowing, the more you read the Bible and you see this. Adam, the first head of the human race, was tempted in a garden where he had everything he needed and he fell. He had everything he needed and he fell. The second Adam, the last Adam, was tempted in the wilderness after fasting. The first Adam should have been successful but he did not. The second Adam against all odds is a victor. Anyway, that's just extra. The point that I was bringing here was Jesus encounters the attack of the enemy and what you're gonna see is Jesus used the sword of the Spirit. He is the eternal God and yet he would not fight Satan without the sword of the

Spirit. Now he's the God-man. He's living as true man. In fact, that's really a part of what's going on in those temptations, is Satan is tempting him away from the mission.

But let's read this passage together, Matthew 4:1-11, and look at Satan and the attacks he makes on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you could say that what's happening here, remember the imagery of the armor we've talked about, the breastplate, guarding your heart and its righteousness, and so Satan, remember how he tempts us? He comes at us against, by thrusting his own sword toward our chest, toward our heart, saying, "You're not worthy. Look at your sin." And we saw we had to put on the righteousness of Christ. We talked about last time the helmet of salvation, how he tries to bring a blow down upon our heads by getting us to calculate and think about how all of this labor, all of this effort seems to be coming to nothing. What good is it? He's trying to discourage us, to get us to get off track with what the mission is, and so we need our helmet. And these attacks like that, you could, if we really spent a lot of time on this, we could look at how these, each of these attacks is elements of those same things. We see some of this as we go. I encourage you to spend time meditating on this passage because we're gonna be here pretty briefly.

Verse 1,

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. 3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You; and 'On their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'" 11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

One of the things I want you to understand about this, those temptations were not easy. We tend to misunderstand and we just kind of tend to assume that Jesus was kind of, his earthly life was kind of like Superman. No, you don't understand what the Bible is really saying about Jesus. He is truly God. He is the one who put the planets in their orbits. Yes, he's the one who was there at creation, the Word that went forth from the Father and caused everything that has come into being to come into being was Jesus. Yes. He's still upholding all things by the word of his power and his deity, but in his humanity he is living a truly human life. He has laid aside the prerogatives. He's not laid aside his being,

he's not laid aside his power in the sense of in his deity, still governing all that he's governing, but in his humanity, he has laid aside the prerogatives of his deity. He's living as true man. He is living in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. He's living in submission to the Father. And these temptations in his humanity are straining everything that he has.

That's why he tells us in verse 11, "behold, angels came and began to minister to Him." The word "minister" here, "diakoneo," we get our word "deacon" but it means "servant," it means "minister," it means "to meet someone's bodily needs." It can be used basically two primary areas, to feed someone who's hungry, and to care for someone who is weak or sick or ill or injured. Jesus feeling the strain and the weight after 40 days of fasting, he is hungry, I'm sure they brought him some food, but he's also exhausted and weakened from the battle and they come to strengthen and sustain him.

So this was a violent spiritual conflict that happens here where Jesus not using the prerogatives of deity and Satan's tempting him to do that. That's the first temptation. The first temptation is to use your prerogatives as who you are. He says, "If You are the Son of God." Satan is such a liar. You know, in I think it's chapter 8, verse, yeah, verse 28. Just look there for just a moment, turn a few pages over, Satan says, "If You are the Son of God," remember? "Okay, You claim to be the Son of God, if You are, show it. Prove it," is essentially what he's doing. Look at this verse, 8:28, this is later in Jesus' ministry, "When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way." There's two demon-possessed men who are so violent nobody goes around there. They're like monsters. They're men who are possessed by demons. Look what they say, verse 29, "And they cried out, saying, 'What business do we have with each other, Son of God?'" What that tells you is the demons immediately recognized Jesus for who he is. They know it instantly. They in the spiritual vision that they have, they see. "Before us is the eternal God."

So Satan when he says, "If You are the Son of God," knows full well he is the living God. That's the kind of liar that we're dealing with, the kind of deceiver, blasphemer. And so he assaults the character of the one he knows to be the eternal Son of God. He says, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread. If You are the Son of God, show it, prove it, make these stones into bread. I know You're hungry. It's been almost six weeks since You ate. I know. I've been studying humanity, this is about the time Your body begins to start to die if you don't eat. You're really hungry, turn these stones into bread. Use Your own power to make Your life work."

But Jesus answers him but not philosophically, not in his own divine wisdom, Jesus answers him by quoting a verse of Scripture. He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, "It is written," and that's the formula. You heard it four times in the passage, three times on the lips of Jesus, one time on the lips of that deceiver because he knows the Scripture too. He twists and distorts it in the next temptation. But every time Jesus responded, Satan attacks three times and Jesus' response is three times, "It is written." That's the sword of the Spirit and it's the word of God particularly responding to the particular attack of the enemy skillfully wielded. The attack is, "You are hungry. Serve, use Your power to meet Your

needs." And Jesus responds, "Listen, I'm not going to act in My deity to make, to turn aside the mission that I have now is to live as true man in complete dependence and submission to the Father by the power of the Spirit." So that Jesus when he does the miracles that he does, does them by the power of the Spirit. You see this as you read Luke's Gospel especially. He talks about the power of the Spirit coming upon Jesus, working in Jesus. Though he's fully God, he could do it on his own but, no, he's living as true man so that he can be a sympathetic high priest to you and me, so that he can be a Savior to you and me. He's living a true human life, tempted in every way just like we are yet without sin.

And so he answers with the word of God, "Man shall not live," he says, "Listen, you're trying to get Me to turn aside, man, I am man, I am the Son of Man," his favorite title for himself in the Gospels, the Son of Man. "I am the Son of Man. I am human. Man shall not live on bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God," Deuteronomy 8:3. He'd memorized it, meditated on it, thought about it. The reason Moses when you read in Deuteronomy 8, the reason Moses says after the 40 years in the Promised Land says, "Listen, there was a reason God fed you with manna from heaven for 40 years. There was a reason. He didn't have you go through a land where there was food that you could pick all every day, you could just go out and pick from the gardens around you. No, he led you through a wilderness so that you would know that you would be fed every day by bread that falls out of heaven so that you would know that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." The one thing that human beings must have is the word of God. We need it more than anything else. The first thing God did when he created man was he spoke to him in Genesis 1 and 2. He gives him his word. Man cannot make sense of his world even before sin comes into the world, man cannot figure out his place in the world without the word of God. And he said, "I need the word of God more than I need My bread. I'm waiting on God's word. That's what I'm waiting on."

So the second temptation. The devil takes him to the holy city. He miraculously, powerfully picks him up and stands him, literally the Greek says had him stand, stood him on the pinnacle of the temple. Extraordinary temptation. And says, "Throw Yourself off because it is written," and Satan quotes Psalm 91:11-12. He knows the Scripture. "Hey, He said He's gonna command His angels concerning You and they're gonna bear You up lest You strike Your foot against a stone. Nothing can happen to You. You know that, that's what the Bible teaches." This is what Satan is saying and what's happening here, he's being tempted to force God's hand. He's being tempted to make God do what he wants to do in order to win a spiritual battle with his enemy. But he does not do that, he is not going to force God's hand, and how does he avoid it? It's with the word of God. This temptation was somewhat enticing but he brings the word of God a balancing verse that says from Deuteronomy also, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," from chapter 10, I think it's verse 13. But anyway, you do not put the Lord your God to the test.

And then, of course, the third temptation. He takes him, whisks him away, puts him on top of a tall mountain and says, "If You'll just worship me, You won't have to go through

all of this suffering that You will have to go through. You won't have to go through all of the pain, all of the agony, all of the rejection of the people. I will give You the keys of everything in the world." And Satan really was the ruler of this world. Jesus calls him that three times in John's Gospel, the ruler of this world. But he's about to be cast out when he says that. The ruler of this world is about to be cast out. But Satan's offering him a shortcut and Jesus again says, "It is written You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve. I'm not going to look for a shortcut. I'm going to worship God. That's what I'm here for as true man."

So if Jesus needed the word of God as his sword, how much more do you and I need the word of God as a sword? How can we possibly think about doing battle spiritually without our sword? It's insanity. And one last thing here, you could say, see not just the placement in the list, why do we need the placement in the list, A. B. The preeminent example of Jesus. C. The promised power to those who use it.

It's interesting, he says it's the sword of the Spirit. I think there's kind of a double meaning going. First of all, it's the sword that the Spirit gave. This is the genitive again, remember of the, or of God, love of God, it's the genitive construction if you remember that from your grammar classes. I was talking to a brother in the church who was telling me he's actually studying grammar so he can do better hermeneutics and he's as old as I am so he's going back and studying grammar. I said, "I'm so, that's just awesome! I'm so glad to hear that." Because when I was in seminary, one of the things that we found out is the people as were studying Greek and Hebrew, the one thing you found out quickly is who knew grammar and who didn't, and all of us didn't know it as well as we thought we had. "Oh yeah, that's what subject/verb agreement, okay? Object of a preposition. Direct object. Indirect object." All of that, we use it all the time but we don't know how to break it down. But to really interpret, do good hermeneutics, you need to be able to break it down and the phrase "the sword of the Spirit," of the Spirit is a genitive construction. The word "Spirit" is in the genitive case in Greek, also Latin, and the question is what's the relationship of genitive, the "of the Spirit," the genitive of Spirit, what's the relationship to sword? How is the word of God the sword of the Spirit? How does Spirit relate to sword? What does it mean?

I think it means two things. It means a genitive of source and a genitive, a subjective genitive. Of source means the sword of the Spirit is the sword that came from the Spirit. The source of the sword is the Spirit. In that sense it's the sword of the Spirit, the Spirit gave us the sword. All Scripture is God-breathed, 2 Timothy 3:16. The word for "breathed," that verb God-breathed is the same word for Spirit in Greek. To breathe, the breath, pneuma, the word pneumonia, illness where you have trouble breathing. It's from the Greek word "pneuma." Breath and Spirit are the same word and so God-breathed, the Spirit breathed out the word onto the pages of Scripture. All graphe, that which is written is God-breathed. Not the thoughts of the author. No, that which is on the page. The word is "graphe, graphic." The word on the page of Scripture is God-breathed. You add to that 2 Peter 1:19 and following where it says that the holy prophets who gave us the word of God did not give us something of their own invention but they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

So the Holy Spirit has given us the Bible, so its source, it's part of it is source, but also I think he's not just talking about source, I think there's a double meaning here, he's also saying the sword of the Spirit given to us by the Spirit is the sword also that belongs to the Spirit and is wielded by the Spirit. That's the subjective genitive.

So it's your sword if you're a Christian and you take up the particular verse of the Bible and you move into spiritual conflict, it's your sword. You're supposed to do that. It's one of the pieces of armor God says belongs to you. You could have been born again yesterday, good news, you have access to the whole armor of God including the sword of the Spirit today. But not only is it your sword, it's at one and the same time the Spirit's sword so that when you take that sword and you take a verse of Scripture and you rightly apply it in a situation and you speak it, what's happening is not only are you speaking it, the Holy Spirit of God is speaking it. That's why it has power. And so that's what he's saying.

So the promised power to those who use it. Why do we need it? It's placement in the list, primary placement, the preeminent example of Jesus and the promised power to those who use it. Now thirdly. We talked about what is the sword of the Spirit and why do we need it, now let's talk about how do we use it. Not why do we need it, why do we use it. No, how do we use it? And the idea here is essentially how to use the sword of the Spirit, you speak the word of God. You speak particular verses, particular texts, particular concepts that flow from texts, and you speak them out loud in interactions with other people, and in doing that you are using the sword of the Spirit. Now you also use it sometimes in your own mind, you speak the word of God to yourself, right? You've got to do that too but I think he's talking more about because it's the rhema of the word of God, the rhema of God. It's the spoken word, so you're speaking it in circumstances, you're speaking it out loud, you're speaking it to people and it's not general speaking of the word, that the Bible says somewhere something like this, "No, the Bible says this," and you say the verse. Maybe it's not perfect word for word, remembrance, and one of the things that's challenging to me in memorizing Scripture is that some of you are old enough to remember that in the old days we all memorized in the King James, remember that? And then you got like a New American Standard or an NIV and now you were trying to memorize and you had the old King James memory and now you've got the NIV or the NASB memories, and now you may have gotten an ESV and so now you're memorizing a third translation, and so a lot of times you'll just kind of mix them together. If you really look back, you're like I'm bring some word from King James and this word is actually, this next word I got from the NAS. That's okay, the idea is because the English translations are trying to give us the original Greek, what God really spoke, and if you're getting the main point of the verse and you're speaking it at the right time, rightly interpreting it, that is the word of God. That's the sword of the Spirit.

So that's what Jesus is doing in Matthew 4. He's bringing up particular verses at the right time to deal with it because he is a skilled swordsman, and the question for you and me is are we skilled swordsmen? And if we're not, why aren't we? And if we aren't, what are we doing about it? What are you going to do about it tomorrow? I mean, if you knew, if

you lived in a time where you had to have a sword, I mean, now we have, you know, guns, we have armies that protect us and all that, but if you lived in a place where there was no army to protect you and you knew the enemy was coming and they were on their way, I mean, you'd want to be sharpening your sword, wouldn't you? You'd want to be practicing a little bit or a lot. Well, we know the enemy's coming for us. We must prepare.

I want to show you something that we talked about last week and then when Charles read the Scripture earlier, he read from Matthew 12 about John the Baptist's beheading, remember last week we talked about John the Baptist and his attack, he experienced a head blow from the enemy? We were talking about the helmet of salvation, remember? John the Baptist was looking at things, he's in prison shortly before his head is cut off. He's in prison, he's looking around and he's saying, "This really didn't work out so well. Something's wrong." And the enemy is tempting him. His flesh is agreeing with that. He's really struggling and remember we talked about John the Baptist, he recognized Jesus when he was in the womb and Jesus was in the womb. I mean, before birth he recognized the Messiah, then he recognized him the first time he laid eyes on him, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," and now in Matthew 11:2, we read, "Now when John while in prison heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to Him, 'Are You the expected One or shall we look for someone else?'" Astonishing. And I mentioned this was a head blow. John the Baptist was experiencing an attack from the enemy to his head. He needed the helmet of salvation. He needed to look back at the broad perspective of God's plan of salvation and understand but he was not wearing his helmet. He was being afflicted.

And what I said last week, remember I mentioned it was like a gut punch to Jesus? I think it was really would have been better to say it was like a head blow to Jesus. John the Baptist's head blow that staggered him led him to be the instrument of a head blow to Christ because he asked, the one who recognized him from the womb, the one who had even prophesied about him to say, "This is the One. Prepare the way of the Lord." That one is saying, "Are You the expected One?" Do you see it, hear Satan's voice working through that? "Are You the expected One or should we expect another?" How astonishing. How painful.

Think about Jesus hearing that. He's dealing with people who don't understand him on a daily basis, people who are opposing him, the religious people are vehemently opposing everything he does, the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, all of the people associated with the regular worship. They're opposing him. He's only got this ragtag group of disciples and the people that he's healing, the poor, and the folks that are coming out, and even they are misunderstanding him. But John understands. John knows. No, he doesn't. And so you could see Jesus sitting there thinking, being tempted to think at that moment, "Is it worth it? If John can falter, who can be saved? There's no hope." But what Jesus does in response in this moment is he picks up his sword. The man of God who is tempted in every way yet without sin just like you, just like me, who therefore is a sympathetic high priest who can come to your aid when you are tempted because he understands what you are going through, he absorbs the head blow and he with the sword

and then that sword that's also a defensive weapon is an offensive weapon and what does he do? He is quoting essentially Isaiah 35:3 and following. When he says this, "Go and report to John what you hear and see, the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them." He's essentially quoting Isaiah 35:3-5 and also Isaiah 61:1 and following. I'll just read those to you and it's not a perfect word for word so it shows you that, you know, we don't have to have it word for word but we have to get the context and the meaning right and what he does is he, of course, gets the context and the meaning, hits it on the nail, the nail on the head.

Isaiah 35:3, "Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble." This is the Lord speaking to the people in Isaiah's day. "Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with anxious heart, 'Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come with vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you.'" Here's the Messiah, the Messiah's coming, take courage. "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah." Streams in the desert. John the Baptist in his own discouragement shares that head blow with Jesus and Jesus quotes Isaiah 35 and he says, "Look around you, the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and you go back and tell John what you see, and the poor have the gospel preached to them," Isaiah 61:1.

He takes that blow and he sends back another blow and it's so awesome. That message is going back to John but I love what happens next. Here you see the grace and mercy of our God in such a beautiful way. I mean, our God is a God of lovingkindness and compassion. He shows mercy to anyone who will humble themselves before him. Though your sins are as scarlet, he will make them as white as snow. Though you have amassed a lifetime of hatred to God, if you will repent, he will receive you into his bosom and he will love you as his own. John the Baptist has just, has shared the attack of Satan and kind of passed it on to Jesus and Jesus has repelled it, and he gives a firm word, "Blessed is he who does not take offense at Me," because he lovingly, he's going to speak the truth. "Tell John he needs to stop taking offense at what he doesn't understand and look at the word and trust the word." That's what he's saying and he quoted that passage that would then tell John, "Yes, he's right. It's not looking like I thought it was gonna look, I thought it was gonna somehow be more of a national movement. I thought there would be more people saved. I thought more was gonna happen. It's not happening the way I understood." No, because the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, it's like a tiny seed that grows slowly and spreads out. It's like a little yeast that spreads out through the bread. It wasn't what we expected, even what John expected.

So Jesus sends back that word. I love this, "As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds." As they are beginning to walk away, Jesus lifts his voice so the crowd can hear and so they can hear. Now remember what John was thinking? We talked about it last time, remember how great his ministry was going early on, people are getting baptized and yet nothing seems to really have come from it. The people really aren't following God. They're not, they're rejecting this who I thought was the Messiah. And so

he is discouraged. His ministry, what good is it? "Have I done all this in vain? Is this all worthless?" That's what John is thinking. "Have I failed?" He passes that on to Jesus, Jesus takes out his mighty sword and defeats the enemy, sends back that word to John, that sword thrust travels back with those disciples so that John, no John is not stabbed with the sword, the enemy who's tormenting John is put away by the sword. Isaiah 35.

But not only that, Jesus speaks some more words. Look at his grace. As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John. He says, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see," Jesus says. "What did you, what is John?" That's what he's basically saying. He's asking the same question John's asking about himself. "What is John? What am I? What is my place? Have I failed?" Listen to the gracious Savior, "What did you go out to see, a man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in king's palaces but what did you go out to see? A prophet. Yes, I tell you and one who is more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I will send My messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you. Truly I say to you, among those born of women, there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist.'" What a kind, gracious response but it's just the truth. John is sitting there staggered, doubting everything, his whole ministry is there hanging by his fingernails. He sends this word to Jesus and Jesus responds, "John, everything's on." I know, this is the way life is. This is the way life is in a fallen world to follow the one true God. You will feel like it doesn't make sense at times, you will have questions that perplex you, that cause you to wonder. Is it worth it? Yeah, that's pretty much the way it happens at some time or other for every faithful follower of Jesus but believe his word. Take up that mighty sword, believe the promise and speak it and drive the enemy away.

So John gets the word back, I'm sure those disciples said, "He said this is what He said, and He said of all the prophets in the Old Testament, you are the greatest. That's what He said." Now he goes on to say, "But he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." So he says that about you. You think your life is worthless? You're a Christian and you're not making the progress you need to make, Jesus says on this side of Calvary, on this side of the ascension, on this side of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, you and I are greater than John the Baptist. We are greater than any of the Old Testament prophets. We have a fuller knowledge of who God is and what he's doing than any of them ever had. So speak these things to one another. Build one another up.

How do we use it? We take it out and we speak it. Now I want to talk, I want to break down three other points. I want to close with three points here of how to use it because Jesus is a master swordsman and you and I need to become, we're not master swordsmen, that's our problem.

The first thing you need to do is prepare your sword. If you're gonna fight, you have to prepare your sword. Any good soldier sharpens his sword. He sharpens the blades, he sharpens the point. He wipes off every stain. After a battle, he wipes off the dirt, he wipes off the blood. He cleans the blade because if he does not, decay will set into the blade and

the blade won't be as strong. At some point when he needs that blade to stop another sword, it will break. So sharpen your sword. Prepare your sword.

How do you do that? I'll give you three things under this first point, prepare your sword. Read the word. Read the Bible. Make a plan to read the Bible daily and read it. Secondly, hear the Bible. You're hearing the Bible today. Hear the Bible. Discipline yourself to regularly hear the word of God. Sometimes just listening to the word but listening to preaching that's hearing the word as well. Preparing your sword, that's preparing your sword. You're putting that, the word, the word of God into your mind, into your heart. Read, hear, thirdly, study. Study the word. Think about it. Wrestle with it. Look at the text. You know, understand what is it saying here? What does this mean? As you're reading you stop and you think about, "I'm gonna study this passage today in my Bible reading. I read three chapters but I'm gonna look at this verse or this passage, this paragraph, and I'm gonna really think about it. I'm gonna study it." Fourthly, memorize the word. Jesus had memorized the word. In his humanity he worked at memorizing the Bible. I believe he had to do it just like you and I have to do it. I don't think he just like divinely, you know, sent it over from the divine side. No, he memorized the Bible in his humanity and therefore he had it, he had his sword when he needed it.

That's prepare your sword. What are you doing to prepare your sword? As I say that, I'm convicted I'm not doing enough to prepare my sword. Pray for me and I'll pray for you. Let's prepare our swords. Let's do more.

Secondly, prepare yourself. How do we use it? You have to prepare your sword, that's A, but you also have to prepare yourself. A person doesn't, a Roman soldier doesn't just work on his sword, he also works on himself. He practices with the sword. He seeks to use the sword. How do I work in this particular moment? If someone comes at me this way, what do I do? He thinks about it. He applies himself and the sword to action.

We need to do the same thing. It's not just a matter of reading, hearing, studying, memorizing it, that's what we did to prepare your sword, now to prepare yourself here are two steps: meditate upon the word. It's not enough merely to memorize it. Meditate upon it. This is the key that is missing and is so powerful. Meditate upon the word means turn it over in your mind. Some of the different Hebrew words in the Old Testament, one of them basically means "to mumble the word," just kind of talk to yourself the word. You're thinking it through. You're saying it over and over and you can kind of think about, you know, do you ever find yourself mumbling as you're thinking about what you need to do? Like I'm working on a project and I don't know what to do here. You say, "I think I need to do this," and you might talk to yourself, or you're thinking that way even if you don't say it out loud, you're kind of working through a series of steps in your mind. "I'm gonna need this tool. I'm gonna need that. You know, I don't have that tool. I've got to go to Home Depot. Oh, I've got to go back to Home Depot. Uh-oh, I've gotta go back to Home Depot." Anyway.

But anyway, so you meditate upon the word. That means take the passage and think about what's God really saying, what circumstance does this apply to in my life, how

does this fit together with the other things God says in Scripture? Jesus was doing that. That's why he was able to say, "Yeah, it's true, Satan, that He will bear Me up and nothing can happen to Me." In fact, that's why he said, in one sense, remember when Jesus was on the boat asleep and the disciples were all upset and he said to them, "Oh, you of little faith." What did he mean? "Do you not know who I am? Nothing can happen to this boat." Psalm 91:11-12 is correct. But the danger of taking Scripture out of context, he understands that for, no, for a human being, we're not to put God to the test ever because God says that in Deuteronomy 10, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." He tests me, I don't test him. He proves me, I don't prove him that way.

So meditate upon the word. How does it apply? How does this relate? One of the really important things of meditation is to see the pictures in Scripture and experience them mentally. See the pictures. I heard a pastor say this one time and I think it's really helpful: don't miss, read the Bible and don't miss the pictures. He's not talking about a children's Bible with pictures. No, the Bible you have that doesn't have pictures, read the Bible and don't miss the pictures because the Bible is filled with word pictures and when God puts a word picture there, he's trying to capture your affections, he's trying to capture your heart. So enter into that, experience what he wants you to experience in that word picture. That's meditation. That makes it become a part of you. That's you learning how to use the sword.

So that's part of preparing yourself. There's a second step on preparing yourself. We said prepare your sword, now prepare yourself, now two points here: meditate and do the word. That's the second thing. Don't just meditate on it, do it. Act on it. Don't be merely hearers of the word, be doers of the word. Now that I understand this, how do I need to do this in my life? How can I put this into practice? Where can I put it into practice? What can I do, Lord? Show me how to be a doer of the word and actually step out and do it, and when you are meditating and you're doing, you're preparing yourself. When you're hearing and reading and studying and memorizing, you're preparing your sword. When you meditate and when you do it, you're preparing yourself.

And then finally, you don't just prepare your sword, prepare yourself, thirdly, use your sword, and what that is, how to use a sword, speak the word. Speak it into the circumstance. Best you know, the best verse that seems to apply, try to be accurate in your application of it, understanding of it, but speak it and realize that when you're speaking it, what you're doing is you are using your sword but it is the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God which abides forever and it is the Spirit of God has his hand on your sword as you have your hand on your sword, and when you let that sword and you move it forward, there's no telling what's gonna happen. Some of the time it'll look like nothing happens. Most of the time it'll look like nothing happens but you and I can't see what's really happening. You and I never see what really happens, even if we think something really happened, we see some outward evidence, we don't really know what happened, the magnitude of it. Often it looks like nothing happened and reality we find out later something dramatic happened.

So use your sword confidently, use your sword. So prepare your sword, prepare yourself and use your sword. When temptation comes, respond with the word. Speak the word. Speak that word that relates directly to what you're tempted by. You're tempted to lust, you speak the word that relates to lust. We're not called to impurity but to sanctification. This is the will of God, your sanctification. That is, that you abstain from sexual immorality. That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion like the Gentiles. That's 1 Thessalonians 4:3 and following. You have a passage like that and you add more passages and you start speaking it. A lot of times in your own heart you have to do that when you're dealing with temptation but whenever you can, say it out loud. And whenever you can, just speak it to someone else, "You know, the Bible says this." And speak it and then let God do what he's gonna do.

I love what Spurgeon said. He said that, you know, sometimes we're afraid to speak the word and he was asked one time about, especially by people that are scoffing, they don't believe the Bible has authority, "What's the Bible got to do with anything? It's just an old ancient book." That's what people believe, right? And someone said to him, "Dr. Spurgeon, how do you defend the word of God? I mean, really, you bring up the Bible but how do you defend the word of God?" And Spurgeon said, "Does a man who has a lion as a pet need to defend his lion? You want to mess with that lion, I'm just gonna let the beast loose." I don't need to defend the word of God, I'm going to let the beast loose. Speak it. That's what God wants us to do. We put all of our armor on and we use our sword, we can stand no matter what kind of attack we're under, for God will make you stand.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word, for its sufficiency, for its power. Lord, help us be more sober-minded to see reality as it is, to see that these days are growing darker, that the warfare is getting more and more imminent and more and more deadly spiritually. Help us to prepare ourselves for battle. Lord God, let us be motivated more than ever before to read and to hear, to study, to memorize, to meditate, to do, and to speak. And Lord, as we do that, let us trust in Your wisdom and what You want to do with it. The results are up to You but let us be found faithful. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.