**The Breastplate of Righteousness Pt. 1**

Good morning everybody. I'm pastor Mark on a welcome you to our sermon this morning. Appreciate the music. Uh, the team this morning, and now I want to look to a continuing series on the invisible war. We're going to be looking into Ephesians chapter six, verse 14. Uh, the breastplate of righteousness has been mentioned earlier.

Ephesians chapter six. I'm going to read just a couple of verses leading into verse 14. It says this, finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes for our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Therefore put on the full armor of God. So when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you've done everything to stand stand firm, then with the belt of truth buckled around your waist with the breastplate of righteousness in place. Let's pray.

Father, we come to you this morning. We thank you for the pieces of the armor, these things which remind us of what you have given us in Christ in the midst of this conflict that we are engaged in as your children. Lord, this incredible gift of the breastplate of righteousness in all this. This means I pray that you would open us our hearts, that we can hear, that we can learn, that we can grow because of our, uh, the teaching.

Of your word on this subject today. In Jesus name. Amen. Albert , a existentialist writer, has written a book. I've mentioned it a couple of times in the past. It is called the fall. It's the story. It's a short book. It's a story of a generous lawyer. Uh, he is a Parisian French, his name is John Baptist.

Claremont's. And he was loved for doing pro bono work. He continually did his work for free among the poor. Uh, he was one who was looked at highly and appreciated much within the city, but one day he was on a bridge at night, and while he was there, he realized that a woman had climbed up on the railing and had jumped into the river below.

And he hears her, and as she hits the water, apparently she, she immediately regrets what she's done and she starts crying for help. And as the current is taking her down, uh, he stands there and he refuses to move. He knows he should. He knows he can jump in and he could probably save her, but he fails to help her.

And as he's there, of course he, he's thinking about all of the, uh, the rationales of why he didn't jump in and, and, uh, she goes too far away. It was too quick. Uh, she, he, he's a lawyer after all, he, he knows how these things go that it's better to not get involved a lot of times in situations. But he struck with his own hypocrisy because he recognizes that the bottom line was he didn't care enough about her to risk himself.

And when this reality is dawning on him in the story, he hears a mocking derisive laugh. Coming from behind him, and this particular laugh is, uh, resonating with his own feeling of, I'm a phony. I'm, I'm, I'm a hypocrite. He looks around, there's no one there over the next few weeks, and then it migrates into months.

He has a number of situations where he is realizing his own hypocrisy. And in each of those events, the mocking derisive laughter is they're accusing him, saying to him, you're a phony. You're a hypocrite. You're not what you pretend to be. And the accusing voice of the mocking laugh eventually just eats a lie, ate him alive, and he eventually falls into a life of despair.

And . In the face of his own self-condemnation. He cannot overcome a son and silence the mocking voice of accusation. We have been talking about the invisible war on Sundays together. We have been talking about this spiritual conflict that takes place between the devil and those that are called in these verses the spiritual forces of evil as they wage war against God and against God's children.

Satan is the great accuser. The word Satan actually means, uh. Prosecutor, he delights to point out our inconsistencies and transgressions. He the lice to be the mocking voice, laughing when we are on the bridge of our own failures and inconsistencies. Okay? No one here. Avoid the voice of accusation and condemnation.

We are afflicted by it. Because the voice tends to resonate with the very things that we say to ourselves. It echoes our own feelings, his temptations, and accusations that the devil brings. Follow parallel tracks with the distinct orientation of our own sinful nature and flesh. He accuses us in the same areas.

We accuse and condemn ourselves. John Bob was scarred by the accusation in the mocking laughter because it affirmed the voice declaring his own inadequacy to himself. This is an incredibly important piece of armor. The breastplate of righteousness. It's so important. I'm actually going to take two weeks to talk about it today.

I'd like to talk about why we need a breastplate. We will also look at faults or or pseudo breastplates. We tend to use to repel the terrible accusations we hear. Next Sunday. God willing. We'll talk about the true breast freight breastplate and the difference it can make in our lives. The last week, pastor Mike talked about the belt of truth, the first Pete of peace of the army, the one that went around you, and, and actually this leather belt often leather.

Uh, the other parts of the armor, as he mentioned, would be clipped to it. That it held things together. It is the truth. The belt of truth, the truth that we find in Christ, all the other aspects of the armor fast Intuit. It is the truth of what we have in who we are in Christ. That is the foundation for all of the other defenses that the armor brings to us today.

First of all, I want to talk about why we need a breastplate and we need a breastplate first of all, because it protects our emotional. Center, the breast plate covered often, they actually came over your shoulders, but at least went from here all the way down to your midsection. Lower midsection. The breast plate protects our emotional center.

It covered the vital organs of an individual. Now for us, the vital organ, that is the center of our emotional. Life is the heart. For the ancients in the ancient near East, they tend to say it was the upper intestines, both of which are covered by the breastplate, and the idea is that we are protected on an emotional level from the charges and the attacks that come to our emotional wellbeing.

Secondly, it as a result of that addresses our inherent. Consistent failure to measure up. This is the voice that we hear. This is the, the mocking laugh that is so powerful in our lives. Okay. This particular reality in understanding why accusations bother us, we, we, we've got to understand what it is that we are accused of and where it comes from.

All of us deal with the struggle to be acceptable. We struggle to feel worthy, worthy of love, worthy of respect, worthy of being listened to, to determine our worthiness. We are constantly comparing ourselves with other people. We're constantly comparing our attractiveness or our brains or our abilities or our success, or our relationships or our homes or our physiques.

Against others. We hate. Then being on the mathematical formula, we hate being a less than. We want to be on the, on the right side of the, of the V. We want to be on the greater than side because we are inherently consistently comparing ourselves and when we feel a less than or we feel that we, the arrow's pointing our way, we feel condemned.

We feel. The accusation of less than, we're not worthy. A guy may say, eh, you may be out there missing. I don't really struggle with that. I mean, if anything, I'm too confident. Well, I would suggest you, everybody struggles with this. Everybody hears the voices. Yeah. No matter if you're a very opinionated person.

A lot of times people that they're most bombastic, the most critical of others, the most, uh, intimidating of others are doing that to totally protect themselves. They'll, they'll knock everybody else down in order to not let themselves look bad. Politicians or political AIDS are consumed with approval ratings.

Teens are striving to fit in. To measure up, to cope with unreasonable, overwhelming expectations of grades and physical attractiveness, social skills, and athletic or other areas of expertise. They feel they need to have it all to be in. Many of you have been watching the last dance, the 10 episode, ESPN special on the Chicago bulls, 1998 season.

It's, it's fantastic. I mean, I love it. Uh. But it was an interesting study for me who Michael Jordan is absolutely my favorite basketball, not my favorite. I believe he's the best basketball player that's ever played. Larry bird's my guy. Maybe cause he can't jump either, but, but Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball I've ever seen play.

But it was striking to me as I watched this, and I'm not in any way dissing anybody, not wanting to. But my, what I was struck with as I watch this is ultra competitive, astonished, astonishing, competitive and driven man. I also saw a man that was discontent. I also saw a man with, that was consumed with the fact 22 years later that he didn't get a chance to get his seventh NBA championship ring.

That. What we call drive in people is usually the response to the mocking voices that say, you're not enough. If you're not a winner, you're not enough. If, if you're not this, you've got to be loved or be admired or be approved or be feared or be a winner to be worthy. And there is intolerable, intolerable shame if we are not.

So here's the question. Where did this come from? Where did this sense of of, of drive and, and passion and, and why? We are so vulnerable to accusations when we feel that we are on the less set, less than side of something that matters to us. I would suggest to you that it goes all the way back to the beginning of recorded history in what is called the garden of Eden.

It is the product of sin in the human race. Adam and Eve did not ever struggle with low self esteem. They did not strive to be greater than they were. Not comparative or discontent. They were at peace and they were satisfied. They worked hard. They had active lives. They weren't just sitting around in a cloud strumming or just hanging out and talking to the animals.

I mean, they weren't, they were energized. They plan, they landscape, you know, whatever they did in the garden, they did it with Gusto and energy. There was contentment and energy, but they were free from the accusing voices in their own head until they fell into sin. Sin brought it about and Satan was correct in something he said.

He said, you will know what you don't know now if you take of this tree of knowledge, and he was right. They now knew. They knew a sense of shame. They knew a sense of competitiveness. They knew a sense of not being enough. They knew what it felt like to not be worthy. The result is they tried to hide their shame where they had been free and nakedness and no embarrassment.

Now they tried to hide their vulnerability, their sense of inadequacy, their, their failure. Yeah. And fig leaves is just a way to try to protect them from the gaze of God and even to some degree, the gaze of each other. Okay. When they chose to not live contentedly in the approval of God, they began to search elsewhere for lesser approvals that would never leave them content.

And so do we. What they now felt was this, my behavior, my actions, my very self are no longer acceptable. I no longer measure up. Ultimately, they felt shame before God. They felt inadequate in the presence of God. See all of your efforts to please your parents at getting in the right school at being successful at being beautiful at being a greater than our, ultimately an effort at covering up that deep sense of

Because we know that God is not pleased with us. We know that we fall short. We all live for a good verdict. We live for approval. We live for the ability to be accepted by somebody. Now, you may be out there and say, wow, that is a big step that you're saying that you know, my struggle of, uh, of the fact that I didn't make the basketball team and how bad I feel about myself is ultimately because I feel God doesn't approve of me.

What I'm saying is that sense of struggle, that sense of, of needing to define and find our satisfaction in, in an identity is because. Sin has created a spirit of, of, uh, Discontentment of inadequacy, of a need, of a verdict that I am in fact worthy, ultimately completely worthy. And the breastplate of righteousness is all about bringing a different verdict to our lives.

We all live for that good verdict. Where do you look for approval and acceptance? I'll guarantee that is where you hear the voice of accusation and condemnation. Okay? Third thing we find is this. We need a breastplate because it addresses the unceasing voice of accusation and condemnation. The breastplate of God gives protection from the accusation that condemns and pains us.

There are mocking whispers of Satan. They can be spiritual. They can be statements like your hardships are proof of God's discipline and judgment that he's not really for you. They can be spiritual in the sense they say your sins and failures are are proof that you're out of favor with God and unsuitable to him, but they also can be our natural life, our general life, not just the vertical relationship.

Your perceived deficiencies or proof you are unacceptable. To God, probably don't think about it vertically as often as we do about our own evaluations, the evaluations of our peers. The common thread in all of our struggles is we are, we feel we are not worthy. We are not adequate. Again, they will usually be the mocking reiteration of what we already feel, that we will hear these voices.

So what do we do. How do we compensate for this, this sense of shame, this sense of a verdict that we're not worthy. How do we, in a practical way, what do we try to do? Well, all of us are trying to put a breast plate on all. Nobody wants to hear. I'm a less than. Nobody wants to be on the wrong side of the arrow.

Nobody wants to live their life being, being, hearing the voice. So, so what do we do? We try to protect ourselves. We all have breast plates. What we attempt to use as a breast plate. First of all, is secular, blessed breast plates. These are just common things in our lives. We all put on breast plates to protect ourselves against the accusations of our inadequacy, our sense of inadequacy and failure.

Ultimately, we're trying to find a way to measure up. There are all kinds of different things people use in our culture. It can be the, um. Our success at our job. It can be having, trying to have a beautiful home at least beautiful compared to other people. Our education and our grades, uh, having body beautiful can be in our own families that we find are, are, are, are the verdict that we are worthwhile person because well, after all our family's doing well or we love our kids, or whatever.

It can be all kinds of things. But success in these areas did not really protect us from the accusations of our lack of approval, acceptance, inadequacy. They just don't satisfy. The result is that we find ourselves living our lives with breast plates that let us down. I remember many of you have watched the movie, um.

Sure it's a fire. And, and the guy in the movie, they're two stars in the movie. One is Eric Little, who is the guy who's running from Scotland and eventually goes to be a missionary, gives his life there, um, for Christ. The other guy is, is an individual, Harold Abraham and Harold Abraham, and it's the true story of the 1924 Olympics.

And Harold Abraham is a runner and a very driven guy. And basically his identity is, is, is a speed, and he can't afford to lose in a different Vic nets. In the story, you see one time where he actually loses a race. It's, it's not a hundred meter, but he stumbles and his timing is off. He doesn't run well, and.

He's devastated until a guy comes and says, look, I can, I can shave a few tenths of a second off. And so he has hoped that, well, okay, I won't ever have to lose again. He finally does go to the 1924 Olympics, and as they go over to France and they're at the Olympics, he's running and he runs the 200 yard dash and he gets beat and.

He's devastated, but fortunately, he's still got the a hundred meter, a hundred yard to go, and he finally runs the a hundred yard dash and he wins and he wins the gold medal. And one of the most powerful scenes in the movie is that night in a, in a little French restaurant, there's nobody there. The place is empty.

The guy is a. Uh, trying to clean up and he's got all the chairs folded up and here they are sitting in this little bar or a little, uh, restaurant with a bar, and it's he and his trainer and the guy's twice as age and they're there and it's just this sorrowful, sad scene where it should be a celebrate Tory thing.

But he's very reflective. He's, he's melancholic and depressed because he's finally tasted. The victory is the fastest man in the world. He won the hundred yard dash at the Olympics and it does not satisfy the breast plate. Didn't work. It still didn't give him the definition that he wanted to have. There are other forms of breast plates that we can have.

There are spiritual ones. The spiritual breastplates or Paul talked about him, Philippians three he said, you know, I was a Pharisee. The Pharisees, I mean, I was the top dog of all the Pharisees. I was the most zealous, the most fanatical. I fasted more than everybody else. I didn't want. I was the one that, that you know, that that persecuted the Christians because it was the right thing to do.

He said, but

what happened was one day he said. As I was striving to, uh, find my identity and, and be worthy and have a verdict of, of, of worthiness and acceptability in my spiritual life, I was studying the commandment number 10, don't covet. And I realized that, that my desire to be spiritual, my desire to, to appear zealous.

Was totally self absorbed that I was, I was totally selfish in every part of my life. And, and in saying I was living a selfless life for God, it was all about me in the, in the book the fall, one of the striking realities that Giambattista is facing that was so overwhelming to him was that he came to see his selfless acts.

As a lawyer doing pro bono stuff, we're, we're actually all about him. He gives one example. He says, I would actually escort a blind man across the street, and then I would, I would tip my hat to him and he said, I, I realized I wasn't tipping my hat to him. He couldn't see my hat. He was doing it for the crowd to draw attention to my action and to the graciousness of my behavior.

And he heard the mocking laugh of hypocrisy. You're not what you say. What he was finding his, his own spiritual fervor and works did not provide a real breastplate against the accusation that he didn't measure up his works could not secure him approval. It can be spiritual things. It can be Christian things as well as, as our job accomplishments or.

How much money we make that we try to find our approval. So what can secure the verdict of approval? The verdict of worthiness, the verdict of Acceptibility. What can be a re breastplate against the accusations that say we are not enough? Well, some of you are here. I know. Listening and knowing that you are driven by the voices that accuse you.

Forces that are declaring to you in one statement or another, you're no good. You'll never be enough. You're unlovely, you're unlovable. You'll never really make a difference. And maybe you've never considered the fact that your emotional struggles are rooted in a spiritual dimension. Your hunger to be worthy, to be adequate, to be acceptable ultimately is the cry for God, for his forgiveness, for his grace, for his verdict of acceptance.

You'll never earn it. You'll never deserve it. But God has given it freely in his son. And when a person embraces Christ as their savior, their whole lives there, they're now growing to live out. What does it mean to have this verdict of Acceptibility that I don't have to live on the grid. We stand excepted in Christ and next week we'll talk more about what it means to be wearing a breastplate of righteousness.

What does that mean? How does that affect our daily living? How do we put that on and and defend our hearts against the accusations, against the voices, the mocking voices. Look, talk about that next week. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for. Righteousness. That is our breast plate. We thank you for Christ. It is in Jesus that we find even such practical benefit of

silencing the voices of that we struggle with many of us every day. Lord, we thank you for journeying with us that you love us. That you have come among us, that we might have an acceptance that is a verdict that frees us from the treadmill of trying to be a greater than God. Teach us how to do that in in the righteousness of Christ.

I pray in Jesus name. Amen.