

ARMOR OF GOD
JANUARY 4, 2026
9:00 AND 10:15
Pastor Carmen Harper

Good morning! As many of you know, my name is Carmen Harper, and I serve here at Woodlawn as an Associate Pastor. Joe is continuing to spend time with family and will be back here preaching next week. I'm excited to share the first sermon of this new year with you.

Let's pray, so we can get started.

Father in Heaven – thank you for a brand-new day of life that brings with it the opportunity to overcome the failures of yesterday and live in a way that is more honoring to you. As we move into this new year of life, speak to our hearts about the need for holiness. Help us to lay down those things that hinder a close walk with you. By your Spirit, the power of sin has been broken in our lives. Enable us to live into that reality.

Holy Spirit come into this place and draw us closer to Jesus. Where there is sin, bring conviction. Where there is doubt, bring faith. Where there is confusion, bring your absolute peace.

Anoint the preaching of your Word and may it go forth and prosper according to your will. In Jesus's Holy name we pray – amen.

How many of you here today are thankful we are in a new year? You have been looking around at what is going on in the world and are thinking that this train has flown off the rails? Right now, you are wondering what can possibly happen next.

Over the past few weeks and months, it has become increasingly clear to a great number of people that we are in a spiritual battle. Unbelievers are waking up to the reality that there is a God. People are coming back to church and believing in Jesus in droves.

We are seeing those who claim the name of Christ persecuted, jailed, and killed.

If last year spoke anything to me, it is that we must be battle ready. It doesn't matter if we want to be embroiled in a fight, it is upon us, so what do we do?

It should not surprise you that you can find the answer to that question in God's Word. Today, we are looking at

Ephesians 6:10-20.

It says: Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 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. 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. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 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. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit which is the word of God. 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, and pray on my behalf, that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in proclaiming it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

The Apostle Paul wrote this piece of scripture to the church he planted in Ephesus. The entire letter to this church is Paul sharing knowledge of what God had done in creating the church universal and how we should live in light of that.

He was actually in prison for sharing the gospel when he penned this letter. He did not know when he would be tried and likely killed for his faith. He had already seen co-laborers of the gospel martyred for the cause of Christ. He knew at any moment he could be next, and the final message he wanted to share with his people is the verses we just read. He knew these might be the very last words of wisdom he could impart to them.

That alone should signify their importance, but when you begin to look at the world and see the Bible spring to life before your eyes, it should be something we try to understand and put into practice.

There has not been a time since Paul penned these words that they were not useful and needed for all believers, but today, we can see with our own eyes the battle that is currently raging. The enemy doesn't even try to be subtle anymore. He parades right down main street, and sadly, people applaud and come into agreement with everything that is evil. The Bible warns those who do this in **Isaiah 5:20, It says: Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.** It's happening, and it is time for the Church to get serious.

Paul knew what it was to be in a spiritual battle, and he wanted to warn and empower other believers to fight the good fight of faith.

In our text, Paul says, Be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might!!! What a great reminder for those of us who have been under spiritual attack. Those of us who are looking around at what is going on in the world and wondering what's going to happen next. How much worse can things get?

Paul is telling us our strength does not depend on us. As God's children, we are in the awesome position of having the strength of the Lord. He is inside us in the person of the Holy Spirit and He's all around us because He is omnipresent. There is not one place we can ever go where He is not there, and when we are in Christ, His strength is for us.

Paul continues, Put on the full armor of God so that you will be able to withstand the schemes of the devil. If having the Lord Himself be our strength is not enough, He has given us a suit of armor to wear. This is Christ's own armor. The book of Isaiah talks about Christ wearing it. Why do we need it?

It says right here in our text to withstand the schemes of the devil. Our enemy is plotting and scheming our downfall. You can go into battle every day with or without your armor; but make no mistake, wearing it or not, you are at war! Like it or not. So, it is important for us to use every weapon and every protection that God offers us. It says put on the whole armor of God because God has already given it to us.

He is telling us they are ours; we must appropriate them for ourselves by putting it on. Just in case you think you don't need it, check out the next part. 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. The Bible is explaining a hierarchy of demonic beings bent on our destruction who are actively working against us.

What happens in the natural is this. . . We get into spats and arguments with those around us, and it seems everyone has someone in their life that likes to stir up trouble and bring in drama, or show up and spew out ugliness just for ugliness sake. but this - - the word of God says we wrestle not against flesh and blood. You see the enemy can and will use those in your life against if he can. He will use your spouse, your children --everyone you love to torment you if he can. You are mad at whomever it is for whatever they said but God says flesh and blood is not the problem. Spiritual wickedness is the problem. The devil and his horde of demons are the problem. They are why we need this armor.

Therefore, Paul says, for this reason. . . because they are so evil and are trying to destroy you. . . take up the full armor of God. Paul is not being hyperbolic when he makes this claim. Our true enemy is satan, and he is why we need our armor.

Peter says the enemy prowls around like a roaring lion seeking those he can devour. Jesus tells us the enemy comes to kill, steal, and destroy. We put on our armor so we can resist the evil and having done all we can do, we Stand.

This always makes me think of a story out of II Chronicles. Jehoshaphat is king of Judah at the time and Moab, Ammon, and the Meunites all come together and decide to make war against Judah. Well, that scared Jehoshaphat to death naturally. Here he is king over this one little nation and these three nations are coming up against him. So, he does the only thing he knows to do. The wisest thing he could have done and what we see so many other biblical characters do. He proclaims a fast and starts seeking the Lord through prayer. He gets all his people together and gets them to pray. In response, the Holy Spirit comes on Jahaziel and speaks for God.

God, through His spokesman, says, Listen, King Jehosaphat and all who live in Judah and Jerusalem! This is what the Lord says to you: Do not be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. For the battle is not yours, but God's.

Isn't that good news! We have a supernatural enemy, but we have an all-powerful God who fights our battles.

The text continues: Tomorrow, march down against them. They will be climbing up by the Pass of Ziz, and you will find them at the end of the gorge in the Desert of Jeruel. You need not have to fight this battle. Take up your positions; stand firm and see the deliverance the Lord will give you, Judah and Jerusalem. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged. Go out to face them tomorrow, and the Lord will be with you.

The people heard God's message, and they obeyed, but I bet they put their armor on before doing so. God had promised to fight on their behalf, but they probably still put on everything they could to be defended.

That's the same thing the Lord is saying to His church here in Ephesians. You need only stand and face the enemy – I will fight on your behalf. Another thing that I noticed in the Chronicles account is that God even told them where and when they were going to find the enemy. He leaves nothing to chance. God sees everything to come and in Jeremiah 33:3 he tells us that he will show us great and mighty things that we don't know. The enemy is coming, but the Lord sees. He tells His children where they will encounter the enemy.

He says, Prepare yourself, put on your armor, go where I tell you to go --- that is where you will meet the enemy - - now just stand there and watch me show up on your behalf. Thank you, Jesus.

What should we do based on what we have read? We should stand - - trusting God is going to do what He says So, we begin to get dressed. We pick up our belt and put it on. Our belt is called truth. You know where you get truth in this world? Only from God. He is truth – His word is truth. We put on the belt so we don't believe the lies of the enemy. Jesus says of satan in John 8:44 that he is the father of all lies. That's why knowing the truth and walking in it is so important.

We might not see a belt as being a pivotal part of our armor, but the belt enables us to strap on the weapons. Back then, men wore tunics. So, when they would go into battle, they would tuck their tunics into their belts to give their legs freedom for the fight. No soldier would think of not having his belt in a battle. It

was far too important. Having our lives filled with God's truth is the only way we can face our own battles.

We put on the breast plate of righteousness. . . the Bible talks about our righteousness in many different places. Always it comes down to this. We receive righteousness because of what Christ did for us. He paid our sin debt and took on our shame. In exchange, He covered us with His righteousness. Now, He is giving us this breastplate.

Notice this piece of armor covers all of the vital organs. Especially the heart. As Christians, it is imperative that we protect our hearts. Jesus said what comes out of our mouth shows the state of our hearts. We have to protect what we allow into our lives by protecting our hearts. We are the righteousness of God. The things that we allow into our lives shape who we are. They ought to be things that glorify God.

So, now we have a belt and breastplate. Next piece is shoes. These are gospel shoes. The word says having shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Put on your shoes and be prepared to share the gospel. That's terrifying isn't it.

No, it's not. It doesn't have to be. It's as easy as you telling someone about what Jesus has done in your life. You don't have to be a Bible scholar or have hundreds of scriptures memorized. You just need to be able to do what the Book of Revelation says. It says the saints overcame the devil by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. Sharing the gospel is as easy as sharing your testimony, your story. People are moved by what God has done for your personally. That's what makes them want what we have.

These are also shoes of peace. Wherever you go, you are capable of taking the peace of God with you. Take love and joy and peace with you.

I said earlier Paul was writing this letter while imprisoned. It is very likely there was a Roman soldier there before him at all times. He was probably looking at him when he penned these words. He was using every piece of what this person was wearing. God was likely speaking to Paul about our armor through the person standing in front of him.

The shoes protected the soldiers' feet, but they also had things imbedded in the soles which helped the soldier keep their feet on rough terrain. God has given us shoes that help us stand regardless of our circumstances.

Take up the shield of faith that you may be able to extinguish all of the fiery darts of the wicked one. God is in control. We have to believe and put all of our faith in that alone. We have to believe that no matter what it may look like, God is good and His character can be trusted. We must believe that no matter what happens in this life, it will somehow be for our good and God's glory. If you allow everything bad that comes into your life to rock your world and shake your faith, life is going to be terribly stressful. We are talking about Christian maturity. We have to come to a place where we allow God to do a good work in us and we believe what He says knowing that He is true. When your faith is rocked, lean on your friends - - let them help you lift your shield. Pray to God and ask Him for more faith. That's what all this about. Asking for the right things so that we can win at life. The word says that in all these things we are more than conquerors. Pick up that shield and believe that God is for you.

During battle, Roman shoulders would hook their shields together in order to advance, or if they were being assailed by arrows from above, they would stand together as one lifting their shields and adding protection to themselves and those around them.

As Christ's body, we do not face our enemy alone. We are surrounded by His children. This is the unity and witness of the saints. As we work to guard one another spiritually, you know what guards our back? The Bible says the glory of the Lord will be our rear guard. We can stand facing our enemy, because we know the Lord goes before us, but He also brings up the rear.

Put on the helmet of salvation . . . you already have salvation. Wear that around your mind to protect it. Satan is coming for your mind. That is his entry point. He will plant thoughts when you are alone and create doubt. He will send others to speak ugly words to you to try to get you off course. You have to know who you are in Christ. Your identity must be firmly rooted in Him, or your mind will be unstable.

Remember, Phillipians 4:8 says whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is

excellent or praiseworthy - - think about such things. That's the practical way to wear this helmet. If you set your mind to think this way, you cannot be recycling those old hurts and hangups that cause us to doubt God and go off course.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 says for though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

The weapons God has given us are powerful. They are spiritual, supernatural even. We need to understand how much power rests in them.

The last piece of armor Paul calls the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. I cannot say enough about the need for you as a Christian to get into the word. God uses it to speak to you. Have you been asking Him for direction and guidance in some way for your life and have not heard from Him yet? Pick up the Word; it is alive; He will use it to give you what you need. Notice also all the other pieces of the armor are for our protection. We get one piece in which we use to fight. Just like Jesus when tempted of satan in the wilderness, our only weapon against temptation is the word of God. If you do not have it in here, it cannot come out of your mouth in order to help you in your time of temptation. Let me tell you something. God is faithful. If you feel like you are failing at the Christian walk, that is on you. These are the things you need to be doing to be more than a conqueror. Remember, God says in all these things, we are more than conquerors. If you are losing, you have to ask yourself why.

So now we have a picture of this armor God has for us and what all the pieces do. What does that have to do with prayer? Well, like I said at the beginning, the enemy is out to get you. It's true.

Life is tough and it is not enough for us to pray for one another like. God bless my friend and give them peace. That's nice, but I would rather pray faith-filled prayers that only an all-powerful God can deliver. I was at a conference last September and one of the speakers was talking about prayer. He said if your prayers don't move you, why would they move heaven? His point was go after it in prayer. James says the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous person avails much. It does much. God chooses to work through the prayers of His people.

DO you want to pray prayers that set things in motion that move mountains and change hearts and see people grow and be saved and set free. If you are going to pray like that; you are going to need to wear your armor. You are going to have to know your authority in Christ and you are going to have to stand in it armored up and ready to go to war.

Lord, thank you for prayer and the faithful prayer warriors you surround us with. Lord, show us how to pray great earth shaking, revival bringing prayers. Give us your strength as we go into battle and empower us by your Holy Spirit to wage war in the heavenlies. Grant us wisdom and knowledge so that we will pray as we ought and so that we will know the needs of those around us. Help us, Lord, to be one as you are one. Grow us up into mature Christians that we may understand the hope of the calling in our lives. Father, remind us every day of the importance of putting on our armor as we engage the enemy. May we put on truth like a belt this day, and may our hearts be guarded by the breastplate of righteousness, help us to bring peace everywhere we go and be quick to share our testimonies with those who need to know you; thank you for gospel shoes, Jesus. Help me to stand shoulder to shoulder today with my brothers and sisters as I take up my shield of faith today. May we rest our shields together in unity that the enemy will have no way to get to us. May your glory be our rear guard as your word promises. Help us to appropriate your word for ourselves as use it as a weapon against the enemy as He comes against us, bring it to our minds Holy Spirit just in that moment of need. Place upon us the helmet of salvation that our mind will be protected from the onslaught of the enemy. Help us to think on those things that are worthy of you. As we have done all of this Lord, we are ready to start our day, we take our stand for your kingdom and will stand as you fight our battles. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Holy Communion

Christ our Lord invites to his table all who love him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another. Therefore, let us confess our sin before God and one another as we pray together the Prayer on the screen.

We do not presume to come to this your table, merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies. We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table. But you are the same Lord, who always delights in showing mercy. Grant us, therefore, gracious Lord, so to partake of this

sacrament of your son Jesus Christ, that we may walk in newness of life, may grow into his likeness, and may evermore dwell in him, and he in us. Amen

At Woodlawn, we take communion by the means of intinction which means you will receive the bread at one of the stations, dip it into the cup, and then partake of the elements. The usher will direct you down the middle row and you will return to your seats on the ends.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us,
Jesus took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

When the supper was over, he took the cup, gave thanks to God, gave it to his disciples and said, Drink from this all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Lord, pour out your Spirit on those gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood.

Make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Closing hymn.

Benediction: now may the Lord bless you and keep you, may he make his face shine upon you, may he lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. Amen