**20200531\_TheBreastplateOfRighteousnessPt2**

I'm pastor Mark. Uh, welcome you to our sermon this morning. Really appreciated the presentation, um, by the healthcare workers and what a beautiful prayer commitment, um, uh, a desire to represent Jesus. Okay. We're going to be looking in our series this morning at a second study on the breastplate of righteousness, which is a part of our invisible war series.

And I'm going to ask you to take your Bibles as you have them to Ephesians chapter six and we're just going to read one verse there, Ephesians six verse 14 and here's what we read.

Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground and after you have 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 together.

Lord, we gathered today on this Sunday morning. And Lord, we come in a, in a season of life with, uh, so many questions, so much pressure, so much chaos and Lord, um, uh, resonate and agree with the prayer that been prayed earlier. We do pray for justice. We pray in all of our lives for a spirit of gentleness.

We pray, Lord, that we would lean into you and that we might be the church, be Christian, be Jesus followers, understanding, caring, and also praying. And Lord, this is a volatile time in our lives as a people, as a nation. And Lord, as we look at this passage of scripture this morning, the breastplate of righteousness, I pray that you would use this, this simple study, uh, to remind us of who we are in Christ, what we have in Christ, what our identity is ultimately as those that belong to Christ.

In whose name I pray. Amen. There's a book that I have really enjoyed, actually, an author I have come to enjoy. Her name is Bernay Brown. And Bernay has written a number of books, one of which is entitled dare to lead. And in this particular book, uh, Renee talks about her own, uh, journey with the subject of what she calls shame and which I'm going to come back to, because in a lot of ways, this is a message.

About shame. It is a message about conquering shame and being defended against shame. And I'll try to define those things as we go along, but I'd like to read to you an excerpt from her book, and she said, before I go on stage, I whisper the word people three or four times to myself, people, people, people, people.

The strategy was born out of desperation a decade ago when I gave what I consider my first talk to a corporate leadership audience, I was trying to find a place to set up camp in a room with 20 other speakers. Each of us waiting to be called to do our Ted style 20 minute talk at this day long event.

When that lonely feeling of not belonging and being out of place started washing over me. When I heard the event organizers talking to the audience, I pulled back a small section of the heavy velvet curtains that separated the green room from the auditorium and peeked out was like a Brooks brothers convention, rows of mostly men in white shirts and very dark suits.

I shut the curtain and started to panic. The guy standing closest to me was a young super energetic speaker who could tell you, could tell, had never met a stranger. I'm not even sure what he was saying to me when I cut him off in mid sentence. Oh my gosh. These are all business people, executives or FBI agents.

He chuckled. Yeah, mate. It's a conference for C levels, capital C, didn't they tell you that? The blood drained out of my face. As I slowly sat down in the empty chair next to me, he explained, you know, CEO's, C O O, CFOs, CMOs. All I could think was there is no way I'm going to tell the guy the truth. He nailed next to me and put his arm on my shoulder.

You okay mate? Maybe it was the Australian accent or the big smile or the name Pete that made this guy instantly trustworthy. But I turned to him and I said, they did tell me it was a C level audience, but I thought that meant down to earth. Like these are real sea level people, salt of the earth, S E a level.

Through a huge, booming laugh. He said, that's brilliant. You should use that. I looked him in the eye and said, it's not funny. I'm talking about shame and the danger of not believing were enough. There was a long pause before I added. Ironically, by that time, a woman from Washington DC who was doing her 20 minute talk on the oil trade, was standing beside us.

She looked at me and said, shame as the emotion. Like I'm ashamed before I could even admit that it was true. She said, interesting. Better you than me and walked off. I'll never forget Pete's response. Look out into that audience again. These are people, just people, and no one talks to them about shame, and every single one of them is up to it into their eyeballs look like, just like the rest of us.

Look at them. They are people. I stood up and pulled the curtain back one more time. The room was darker and the speaker was talking from the stage. I wanted to see the audience members faces, but my side view made it tough. Then like a slow motion scene from a movie, a large bald guy turned to whisper something to the guy sitting next to him and I saw his face.

I gasped and pull the curtains closed. I know that guy. We got sober around the same time. And we used to go to the same AA meetings in the mid nineties I couldn't believe it, and as I sat there wondering if I was in the middle of a miracle, my new friend Pete walked up. You're doing okay. He asked. I smiled.

Yeah, I think so. Just people, right? He patted me on the shoulder and told me that a woman was standing outside the green room door asking to talk to me. I thanked him again and went to check on my visitor. It was my neighbor. At the time. She was a managing partner at a law firm and she was attending the event with several other partners and a few clients.

She told me that she just wanted to say hello and she was attending the event, sorry, and wished me luck. I gave her a quick hug and she went back toward the auditorium doors. I walked across the lobby, stepped outside for some fresh air. She may never know what it meant for me to see her that day. I appreciated the kindness and connection.

But it was the simple act of seeing her that made all the difference for me. Yeah. She's a partner in a prestigious law firm, but she's also a daughter who I know recently moved from her mother from moved her mother from assisted living to hospice. She's also a mother and wife going through a difficult divorce.

People, people, people. Renee tells the story of how she ended up having an extraordinary meeting with all these C level people. As they openly identified with her talk on shame. Shame is another word for self-condemnation. Whether you are a kid in school or the CEO of a giant corporation, you struggle with it.

It is what the breastplate of righteousness is designed to help us with. Because the breastplate of righteousness is about shame. It is about self condemnation. It is about protection against the verdict. Of unworthiness as we talked about last time. Just for a moment, I just want to review very quickly our study last week with just a couple of thoughts.

First of all, we talked about why we need a breast plate and how all of us are shielded, uh, in our emotional center by the breast plate. That, that it shields us from the voice that we are not worthy, the verdict, that we are unacceptable and don't measure up. Last week we highlighted how every one of us is influenced by our insatiable pursuit to feel worthy.

I talked about where this came from, that this entered the human race through the fall of mankind into sin. That actually Adam and Eve did not have that sense that there are. Church fathers that write extensively on this too. In particular a man named Athanasius and also Gregory of Nazianzus, and both of them use the reference of to explain that Adam and Eve had been quote, closed in the love and acceptance of God, but when they fell, they became aware that they had, they had cast aside that safety, and now we're aware of their nakedness.

And they were left with a sense of exposure and fear and guilt and shame, and we have all been on the same quest of being declared worthy as they, we try to cover the shame of our nakedness by establishing our worthiness in some way. We talked about this last time, and fig leaves or breast plates are designed to hide our sense of inadequacy and shame.

We also mentioned. That. Okay. We all use things as breastplates that when you fail, when you did not feel presentable, when you are seen to be a failure, when you look awful in the mirror, when you're fired from your job, when you're jilted by a girlfriend, if there is something you try to find to find that you are still acceptable.

And that is a breast plate. It is something to cover our sense of shame. You might do it by saying something like this. While I may not be a great salesman, but my kids love me, or well, she may not like me, but she was looking for someone who can, she can boss around. I may not be as romantic as she wants, but at least I'm a man.

Well, our house may be beautiful, but she's a nag to her. Kids will, I may look wrinkly and flabby, but I have a cool car and an important job. I'm more moral than most people are going to be a variety of things, but something we use to to, to be a breastplate, to rescue us from the condemning voice. Shame.

Could be defined this way. Shame is the feeling that washes over us and makes us feel so flawed that we question whether we're worthy of love, belonging, and connection. Everybody struggles this and it is the result of our fallenness in sin, the breast plate, the true breast plate. Is given to us to combat this sense of, of the verdict of unworthiness, the sense of, of shame that we feel.

And this true, blessed played is described here in Ephesians six 13 as the breastplate of righteousness. And it is a righteousness that provides real protection. In Romans chapter three 21 and 22 we read, but now a righteousness from God apart from law has been made known. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe that there is a righteousness that enables us to, to be able to combat the, the verdict of condemnation.

Righteousness, which is the what the breastplate consists of. It means doing right. It is mean measuring up, being worthy, getting a verdict of acceptability, and we're told in this passage that it is a righteousness that is from someone else's work. It is a breastplate of righteousness. Not that we do. As a matter of fact, in Romans three in that verse I read, but now our righteousness from God apart from law.

It's not by our doing it. It's not by us measuring up. It's not by our keeping the standards of holiness and righteousness. It is rather a righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe that. It is a righteousness that Jesus brings. It is a righteousness that is found in Christ and we're reminded of that in this passage.

In second Corinthians five God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. There are two sides to the cross. On the one side is the, the the reality that our sin is laid upon Jesus Christ. He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. He bore, he became our sin.

He became liable for our sinful practices, but that is not all that took place on the cross. On the other side of the cross was Jesus extending to us his righteousness. That his re righteous report card of straight A's of fulfilling all righteousness is laid to our account and the consequences of our behavior fell on him.

The consequences of his behavior falls upon us and we become liable for his righteousness. Just like he became liable for our. Ungodliness and unrighteousness, and the breastplate of righteousness is that we stand in this state of eternal acceptance in Christ. It isn't only were forgiven and are now innocent.

It is that we stand in the very righteous acceptance of Jesus. So what does that mean when he says to put on your breastplate that that somehow that is to help us against the verdict of shame and the accusation of condemnation that we receive. Well, putting on the true breast plate involves a couple of things.

First of all, it is a continual discerning of our need for Christ and his righteousness. There is a continual intention in scripture to demonstrate to us our inability to live the Christian life. To defend ourselves on our own faithfulness, abilities, and reaches resources. The message of the entire new Testament.

Is that no one, but Jesus Christ can live the Christian life that no one but Jesus Christ can fulfill the standards that we stand accepted in Christ, but we are still utterly incapable to fulfill righteousness in our lives. It is because of Christ at the center of our lives. It is. It is his life and his, the resources that he gives in himself that enables us.

To live a righteous life. So the entire experience of the Christian life becomes depending on Christ and his righteousness that we are not to trust in ourselves, but in him and his righteousness. That we are accepted in Christ. Now of Satan comes along and says to us, look at what you did. Look at how you've acted.

Look, look at what you're not. Look at. Look, look at your, your your failures, your lacks your floss. We come to the accuser and say. It's not on the basis of my righteousness that I'm accepted to God. It's on the basis of what Jesus did. It's his report card that I stand in and as the old hymn says, well, may the accuser roar at things that I have done.

I know them all and thousands more. Jehovah, no with none. He doesn't keep record that we, the record has been. Erased of our floss because we stand in Christ and J D Greer and his great book. The gospel says, we must continually remind ourselves of our identity in Christ, our acceptance that we can never be more accepted.

No matter what we do, we can never be less accepted. No matter what we do. If we stand in. The righteousness of Christ. Here's what he says. You must well in this great truth daily, sometimes hourly, sometimes every minute is the only way to drive out fear, unbelief, and temptation. Why so often? Because again, you're hard wired for works righteousness.

When you're not deliberately thinking gospel, you've probably slipped back into self justification mode. It's, it's a lot like the plastic rodents in that whack-a-mole game. You play at the fair. Just when you've knocked one down, another appears from a different place. The moment we take our eyes off the gospel, those rodents of self righteousness and self-condemnation spring back up, so we must pound them down with the counterintuitive truth of the gospel.

God's acceptance is given to us in its entirety as a gift to receive by faith to the praise and glory of God. Okay. What are the benefits of this? This breastplate and, and employing the breastplate means that we are continually reminding ourselves that this is who I am in Christ ultimately fully accepted.

So how does this benefit us in, in practical life experience in two ways. Number one, it frees you to grow and change. And you may be out there and you may be listening to me and saying this and saying, man, this sounds like a pretty good gig you're talking about. I mean, I mean, here's the hit. Here's what I hear.

The message of, of Jesus is that, that I'm, I'm accepted that, uh, Jesus lives in me and it doesn't really matter what I do. I'm never gonna lose that acceptance. He'll never love me less. Never accept me less. So I can do what I want. I can live like I want. I don't need to feel guilty. I'm in Mark. It's an awesome religion.

You've got there, but it is true that your acceptance with Jesus is secure, but your choices still matter. There is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt. Could be defined this way. I did something bad that if you cheat on your boyfriend or you snap at your kids, or you lie to your parents, you should feel guilt about it.

You did wrong. You should make it right. But there is a big difference between. The response of guilt, which can be a godly response and the response of shame and condemnation, which is what the devil is always trying to do. Shame is defined this way. I am bad. I am unworthy. The verdict of me is trash. That what I am is unacceptable, that I can never reach the standard, can never be good enough to my spouse, to, to, to my relatives, to my employer, to my God.

And what I have to do is constantly recognize. I'll never, never earn acceptance. But we feel guilty when we hold up something we've done or failed to do against our values, and they don't match up. And we should feel guilty when we recognize that we have not responded. And this is where the role of of the scriptures in our lives that God in James, it says, he shows us his, his, his word in order to be a mirror.

We look at the mirror and we say, well, that's not Jesus. The way that I'm behaving, the way I'm treating my wife, the way I talked in that situation, that's not Jesus, and it shows me the character of Jesus and I look and I say, Whoa, that's not me. That mirror reveals what is going on inside. I should feel guilt.

I should feel a sense of sorrow over that. It is what drives meaningful change, but shame. Corrodes the very part of us, that belief that we can change, that the it takes away hope and this sense of condemnation, this self condemning reality that that Bernay Brown and others would call shame is the sense that I am dirt.

I am unworthy. That the verdict that I give to myself, when that happens, we are stymied. In the beautiful privilege of growing and changing. Guilt is important. Shame is destructive. The breastplate of righteousness is there not to, to defend and say, no Mark. You never do anything wrong. That you know when your wife is saying you're responding that way, you don't listen to her because man, you stand with the breastplate of rights.

And now that may move sounds pretty good to me, but, but it wouldn't feel good to anybody else. That the breastplate of righteousness protects us from the verdict that I am unworthy. Secondly, the breastplate of righteousness frees us to grace others.

Yeah. When we recognize that we stand in the righteousness of Christ, that our verdict is that we are declared acceptable by the one who knows us best, empowers us to be grace extenders to other one of the quote from Bernay Brown and her book dare to lead. She says, this. We're now seeing that shame often fuels narcissistic behavior.

In fact, I define narcissism as the shame-based fear of being ordinary where shame exists. Empathy is almost always absent. That what's made shame dangerous. The opposite of experience. Shame is experiencing empathy, and when you feel condemned, when you feel what you are is unworthy. You're in survival mode, right?

I mean, you're just, you're desperate. You're, you're just, you're, you're incapable of looking out for others. You're an absolutely, life is fearsome. It kills your capacity to do relationship with others, to love others because you're hearing the verdict of, of unacceptability or unworthiness, and this is where the child of God can go.

And remember. No. I stand my protection to those assaults on my soul and heart isn't, yeah, because I did wrong and I screwed up and I need to take responsibility for that, but, but that isn't all God sees when he sees me. I stand in the righteousness of Jesus that that from first to last, I'm a beloved child.

That has been forgiven. Linda Hartling says it this way, as she and her fellow researchers at the stone center identify shame shields or, or strategies of, um.

shame shields, and they also talk about them. They are, they are strategies protecting us from the feelings of shame, from the verdict of condemnation. And she says, these are some we do. We move away from others. We withdraw, we hide, we silence ourselves. We keep secrets. Or our personality may be to move towards and, and try to, to placate and to appease.

And please. Or we may as many do move against, try to gain power over others by being aggressive and by using shame to fight shame. The beautiful reality of Jesus's and the compelling welcome of Jesus was the reason that Jesus was so safe for people was that he was never on the line. He didn't feel condemned.

He didn't feel, he knew he was loved. He was affirmed. He was desired. He was accepted that he belonged to the father. He was free to be safe to other people. The more we are operating with the breastplate of righteousness, that this is my identity, beloved son, desired of God accepted in Jesus because he wanted me.

The freer. We are the most tolerant grace-filled people I know are people that are very honest about their own sin and selfishness. They're honest about themselves, but they are joyfully depending on their standing in Christ. That their acceptance is through Jesus and so they want to live day by day and go to the word as a mirror to say, you know what?

Part of me is reflecting Jesus today. What parts? Not because, man, I just want to move away from that part because I want Jesus to be my very life. I've made this statement before and I'll do it here as I close. You are more corrupt, self-centered, and sinful than you ever dared belief, but you are more valued.

Accepted and loved than you ever dared hope. This is the reality of standing in the righteousness of Christ. It's his acceptance that has been given to us. It is our shield against the verdict that that is a shame based verdict, that the we're unworthy. You're you're, you're dirt. This is our blessed breastplate, our identity in Christ.

Lord, we want to live there. We want to learn more and more how to live in the security of the righteousness of Christ. Lord Jesus, thank you for providing that acceptance. May it be the verdict that we hear today in Jesus name, amen.