Stand Firm, Wearing the Shoes of Peace

by Mark Jarvinen

This is the fourth in a series of messages on **"Standing Firm in the Face of the Enemy,"** based on Paul's closing admonition to the Ephesians to use all the resources available to them by virtue of their standing in Christ to overcome the onslaughts and attacks of Satan, the great enemy of our souls. We have mentioned time and again that the Christian life is not a playground, but a battleground. There is warfare being waged against us in the heavenly realms, but as we put to use our resources in Christ, i.e. "put on the full armor of God," we can stand. Satan is already a defeated foe, but we must nevertheless, take our stand in the victory of Christ, and experience the full benefit of that victory in our lives.

A few decades ago, for **Father's Day**, I received a **gas grill** from my family. Guess who was behind the purchase of that gift? I wonder what would happen if I bought Martha a **"catcher's mitt,"** for **Mother's Day?** All kidding aside, I enjoy grilling, but nobody told the family that a grill doesn't come assembled from the store unless you ordered it that way. If it comes in a box, you have to assemble it yourself. The instructions said it would take roughly two hours to assemble. I knew I was in trouble. It took me 2 weeks to find the five or six hours it took me to put it together. There's an analogy between my gas grill and the Christian life. In Christ we have all the resources we need to

live a victorious life, but they're in kit form, just like the pieces of a gas grill, but they have to be fitted together. As Christians, we have the full armor of God, but it has to put on piece by piece, in order for us to stand firm against the enemy.

We've already mentioned the ***"belt of truth,"*** with which we overcome Satan's attempts to **divide,** and the ***"breastplate of righteousness,"*** with which we overcome his efforts to **denounce** (accuse) us. Today, we'll consider standing firm against the enemy's efforts to **destroy** us. Just as war destroys, war is overcome by peace. Thus we need to have our ***"feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace,"*** as **Ephesians 6:15** suggests. Let's break down what Paul means here.

In Paul's day, the Roman soldier wore sandals that were firmly fixed to his feet by leather straps. On the soles of these sandals were **"hobnails"** or short cleats to give the soldier firm footing on the ground. A soldier couldn't afford to fall down in battle. One's very life could depend on maintaining firm footing. Furthermore, with firm footing, a soldier would be less likely to give ground when the fighting grew intense. Shoes are important to a soldier's effectiveness in battle. Paul's use of the word ***"readiness,"*** or as the **KJV** translates it, ***"preparation,"*** both fit this idea of maintaining a firm footing.

I. READINESS GOES WITH THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE.

The word in Greek is ***etoimazia*****,** which means a **"spiritual buoyancy"** or **"lightness of step,"** very akin to the word **"joy."** This spiritual readiness remains intact even when the circumstances are adverse and the temptation to run is very real. Like a buoy at sea that remains afloat though tossed and buffeted by waves, a Christian maintains a certain kind of balance or ***"spiritual athleticism"*** in the face of intense warfare. Like a pro basketball player going for a slam dunk, or a world class sprinter defying gravity in their dash for glory, a Christian can persevere in the face of adversity and face life with a sense of boldness because of the ***etoimazia*** that is ours in Christ. Another analogy of ***etoimazia*** from the Civil War is the ***"rebel yell,"*** issued by Confederate troops just before they were ready to charge Union lines. According to the Union troops who heard it first hand, it was a bloodcurdling, death defying shout that struck terror into the hearts of Union soldiers.

We see a classic example of ***etoimazia*** in **II Kings 6.** The king of Aram was at war with Israel. Elisha, God's prophet, kept warning the king of Israel as to the enemies whereabouts, which infuriated the Aramaen king. ***"Who's tipping off the Israelites about our troop movements?"*** the enemy king thundered. His advisors told him it was Elisha. ***"Where is he?"*** the king asked. ***"I want him captured."*** Elisha was in Dothan so the enemy king moved an entire army there with horses and chariots and surrounded the city. Note the contrast, between Elisha's servant and Elisha himself. In **6:15,** in response to the presence of enemy forces, the servant said, **"Oh, my lord,**

what shall we do?" Elisha replied, ***"Don't be afraid. Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."*** What did Elisha mean? He knew that there was greater strength in the unseen reality of the hosts of heaven than in the visible reality of a vast enemy army. Elisha prayed for his servant that his eyes would be opened to see God's superior strength. God answered that prayer, because when that servant looked at Elisha, he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha **(6:17).** God went on to blind the enemy army and Elisha was dramatically spared. At the end of this story, the enemy army of Aram actually become Israel's friends. What Elisha demonstrated in the face of the enemy was a ***"spiritual readiness,"*** a confidence in God that was greater than enemy chariots. In Christ, that readiness is ours as well.

II. WHERE DOES THIS READINESS COME FROM?

The answer is in our text. This readiness or sense of balance comes from ***"the gospel of peace."*** Similar to the breastplate of righteousness, the **readiness** that comes from **the gospel of peace is the recognition of the completeness of our position in Christ and who we are in Him.**

We all want the peace of God, that sense of calm that Elisha had even as he watched the enemy chariots surround the city of Dothan. We want the peace of a middle-aged pastor's wife, whom I once knew, who after leading in worship one Sunday, handed the music minister the order of service that she had planned for her own funeral, a service which would take place just two

weeks later, when she finally lost her 4 year battle with cancer.

But this **peace of God** flows out of a prior reality – ***"peace with God"***, by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ. ***Romans 5 :1*** says, ***"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."*** Peace with God means that the dividing wall of hostility toward God has been torn down. Through faith in Christ we are reconciled with God. The war is over. Our sinner's rebellion has been quelled. The white flag of surrender has been raised. At last we are at peace. God has reached out to us through His Son, Jesus, while we were still enemies and made us His friends. As we are taught in ***Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***

III. THIS READINESS HAS INCREDIBLE PRACTICAL BENEFITS.

This readiness that comes from peace with God has tremendous practical benefits. The apostle Peter speaks of the devil prowling about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Peter prefaces that verse, however, with one of the most comforting verses in all of Scripture: ***"Casting all your care upon Him (Christ); for he cares for you."*** Knowing Christ cares for us gives us great confidence in spiritual battle against the enemy.

It is my belief that a lack of assurance regarding the Savior's love and

care are the primary source of failure and spiritual breakdown in the Christian life. Why do we find so many bitter Christians? So many members of God's family who have become difficult and negative? So many believers who are easily offended? At the root of these problems is a deep underlying sense of insecurity and inferiority, caused by feelings of being unloved. People whose lives have been touched by the love of Christ do not feel inferior, or insecure, or easily offended, or difficult, or bitter. Love brings contentment, and if the gospel of peace tells us anything - it tells us that we are loved with the most perfect love possible - the everlasting love of God. **(John 3:16).**

In reading through **Joshua**, I ran across **Rahab** - a woman of ill repute, who helped a couple of **Hebrew spies** escape the city of **Jericho**, and for her heroics was promised safety during the fall of Jericho's walls. Reading the genealogy of Jesus' ancestors in **Matthew 1**, you run across an interesting name in **verse 5.** It says, ***"Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab."*** Don't let the significance of this pass unnoticed. First, that a prostitute is mentioned as an ancestor of Christ speaks volumes about the grace of God to love and forgive sinners. But consider her son, **Boaz**, for a moment. Boaz is the generous, kind, and good man who rescued **Ruth** and her mother-in-law, **Naomi**, from the brink of starvation in the book of Ruth, and later, agrees to marry Ruth and become her kinsman redeemer.

Here's an important question for us. How does the son of a prostitute grow up to be a kind, loving, and honorable man? What might his life have

been like growing up in that kind of environment? He could have been bitter and held a grudge against his mother. He could have grown up feeling unloved in the home of a woman who slept all day after working all night. He could have heard slurs against his name as people speculated about who his father might be. We could understand if Boaz had turned out to be a hardened, mean-spirited, self-seeking man. Why wasn't he? Because the grace of God broke into that home, first in transforming his mother from a life of prostitution, and then leading him to faith as well. Boaz was found by the Father's love, and the book of Ruth simply breathes this reality.

As Christians, we don't need to blame our present circumstances or any adversity in our lives on our background. We don't need to put up barriers with people in order to protect ourselves from getting hurt. We don't need to nurse old wounds and emotional scars. We don't need to live down our family history. We don't need to live in the grip of inferiority complexes, because the grace of God can heal lives and our peace with God assures us of a love far deeper than any human love, the love of God.

As we experience peace with God, we undergo a whole new outlook on life - **a paradigm shift.** Each of us operates according to a paradigm, or a perception of reality. Until about 500 years ago, people believed that the sun rotated around the earth, because that's the way it seemed to the eye. That was their paradigm concerning spatial reality, albeit wrong. Some people died trying to change that paradigm. But eventually people like **Copernicus** and

Galileo proved the old paradigm wrong, and a shift took place.

People today live with some faulty paradigms in the spiritual realm as well. Most of them stem from placing self at the center of the universe. **"Everything must revolve around me,"** man's own wisdom and inclination demands. Peace with God is a new paradigm that says **"Things can't revolve around me, or my life will be a mess."** In this new paradigm, our lives revolve around the **Son,** and from that reality comes the possibility for peace with others.

A couple of decades ago, when **Pastor Tim Keller** was becoming widely known as a church planter in Manhattan, I heard him share in a sermon how a man he knew from Southern California **"traded in"** his wife for a **"newer model."** However, through a series of events, this man became a believer in Christ. Unbeknown to this man, the wife he had left also became a Christian. Both responding to their new-found faith, they eventually reconnected, and their marriage was restored. Keller asked him why he wanted to get back together with his wife. He said, **"From the vantage point of a Christian, I began to see her through the eyes of Christ, and she was beautiful to me."** He went on to say, **"And furthermore, I started thinking how short life is, and then comes eternity. If Christ can love me for eternity, I can love the same woman for a lifetime."**

Do you see how powerful is the gospel of peace? Through faith in the

gospel, our personal completeness in Christ leads to completeness with others. Satan will never be able to destroy the lives of those whose feet are shod with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

A-men.