The body of believers - standing tall

In our first lesson for this morning we heard the original David and Goliath story. It is an account that has been retold and remade time and time again. It is the classic underdog story of the ages. You have the champion; Goliath verses the shepherd boy; David. King Saul took one look at David and said, “you are not able to go out and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.” If you didn’t know this story, you might tend to agree with the king. Here you have Goliath a professional fighting man who at 9 feet tall stands about 4 feet taller than the rest of the army. Goliath’s muscular body easily carried 125 pounds of armor and could throw a 50-some odd pound spear. David on the other hand was a shepherd boy about half as tall as Goliath. David is described as ruddy with a fine appearance and handsome features.

Saul realizes David is going to need some protection if he stands a chance against this Giant of a man so he dresses him in his armor. But I imagine that was kind of like putting an NFL linebacker’s pads on Pierce Rogers. So instead David enters the battle field to face Goliath with 5 rocks and a sling shot. Goliath yells, “come here and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field!”

Do you ever wonder if you would have the intestinal fortitude of the boy David who faced the Giant Goliath? When danger rears its ugly head have you been one who has quickly turned your tail and fled? If you were faced with a foe like Goliath would you cower in the fetal position or would you stand tall to face him? Today God calls and equips us to stand tall.

Today we finish our sermon series on the body of believers. Paul has given us a well rounded look at what we are. we are the body of believers united by the blood of Christ, we are the body of believers separated from a lifestyle of sin by the Holy Spirit, we are a body of believers that is emptied of sin through repentance, we are a body of believers filled with the spirit through the word of God, we are the body of believers bowing low to one another out of reverence to Christ, and finally today we are the body of believers standing tall against the devil’s schemes.

Today God encourages you for the battle through the apostle Paul, who writes, “10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Paul starts by reminding us that our intestinal fortitude comes from the Lord. Be strong “in the Lord”. Earlier Paul wrote that he wanted our eyes to be opened to know God’s, “incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” (Eph. 1) Now Paul wants his readers to know that our power comes from the one who has already defeated the enemy. We are being made strong, we stand tall by the power of God. So I suppose it is really not intestinal fortitude that we have but a spiritual fortitude that we are given.

And we need to be strengthened when you consider who we are doing battle with. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.12 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. Our enemy is the devil. Created as an angel the devil rebelled against God and was banished from heaven. He is the leader of thousands of demonic foot soldiers. He has supernatural powers that enable him to do counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders. He can invade our minds and influence our thoughts. His intelligence allows him to twist scripture in a devilishly deceptive manner. And finally he has been doing battle for thousands of years. The devil has honed his skills on men like Adam, Abraham and King David. He knows where men’s weak spots are and he is scheming a way to strike at yours. … I would rather fight Goliath, wouldn’t you?

But fear not body of believers, God has equipped you for this fight. 13 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. You body of believers stand tall against the attacks of the devil with the full armor of God.

Paul begins to describe our armor in verse 14. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist. The soldier’s belt was a wide strap of leather that protected you from anyone who wanted to “hit below the belt”. Armed with the truth we are able to withstand the cheap shots of the devil. Personal attacks against our self esteem or self worth are repelled when we wear the truth of John 3:16 that reminds us in God’s eyes we are worth the life of his only Son.

Next Paul encourages us to stand tall with the breastplate of righteousness in place. The soldiers breastplate was either leather or form fitted bronze. It was used to protect the vital organs. Righteousness is the
breathplate we are to wear. Righteousness is described as a robe in Is 61:10, "I delight greatly in the LORD: my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." … I think God describes it that way to comfort us. God’s righteousness is wrapped around us like a warm fuzzy robe. Here that same righteousness is described as a breastplate. I think God does that to give us courage and confidence. It is strong and able to withstand the attacks of the devil. With God’s righteousness strapped to us we stand tall against the attacks of the devil because his accusations bounce off our chest like bullets off superman. Oh oh it is like we can say to devil, ‘I am rubber you are glue what you say bounces off me and sticks to you.’ Think about it, what accusation can the devil bring against you when you are wearing Christ’s breastplate of righteousness? ‘You have been guilty of not honoring God.’ ‘I admit that I have devil, but what of it?’ Jesus died to forgiven that sin I am righteous.’ ‘You have lusted some hated others.’ ‘Again devil that is true but God in his mercy remembers my sins no more.’ …Every accusation of every sin bounces off the breastplate of righteousness. Righteousness is described as a robe for our comfort here it is described as a breastplate for our confidence.

The body of believers can also stand tall because our feet are 15...fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. It might seem odd to speak of peace in the middle of a battle but remember that in Christ the battle is already won. We are at peace with God. So like shoes that allow a herald to run great distances proclaiming victory the gospel allows us to go to all nations proclaiming the same thing.

Stand tall believers because in addition to all this you are to 16...take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. The shield that Paul would have been thinking of was the ancient four cornered long shield that nearly shielded the entire body - it was almost a portable wall. When the devil starts shooting temptations at me I like the idea of my faith being a portable wall. Faith is a shield against temptation because at the heart of temptation is doubt. ‘Did God really say...’ When the devil tempts you with greed he is causing you to doubt God's promise to provide for you. When he tempts you with loneliness he wants you to doubt Jesus’ promise to be with you always, when he tempts you with despair he wants you to doubt that God works all things for your good. On and on the devil tempts you to doubt God. These darts of temptation that Satan throws at you can only be repelled by faith, or trust in the promises that God has made to you.

Stand tall believers, 17 Take the helmet of salvation. The helmet protected the part of the soldier that was tasked with direction. When the devil starts to play mind games with us and tells us that God so loved everyone in the world but you, that you are too much a sinner, not enough of a believer, when the devil whispers there is no place in God’s heaven for people like you. That is when we most need our helmet of salvation that is when we most need to be reminded the direction that we are headed. By the power of the Holy Spirit we know our direction, we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor 4:18)

Stand tall body of believers because you wield the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Finally we get to hear about our offensive weapon. To many it might appear to be as threatening as a pocket full of stones. Just as David's rocks caused Goliath to laugh so also many scoff at the power of the Bible. But what some fail to see is that this book is the Word of God. The same Word that demonstrated its power when it created the heavens and the earth "let there be"(Gen 1:3). The same Word that raised the dead, "Lazarus, come out!" (Jn 11:43). The same Word that defeated sin death and the devil "it is finished" (Jn 19:30) This is the weapon that God gives to you to wield against the devil. This sword has power.

The final thing a well armored soldier needs is a good battle cry. You know something to speak and shout as you take the battle field against your enemy. The Christian soldier has his prayer. Paul writes, 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. In our gospel lesson for this morning Jesus stands like a William Wallace before the battle line shouting out a battle cry for you, [Father] "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." (Jn 17:15) We too pray for all believers everywhere who join the fight against the devil. In Jesus name, we raise a battle cry that causes the very demons of hell to tremble.

Young David wore this armor. It is what allowed him to stand tall as he faced Goliath, it is what caused him to charge into battle, and it is what caused him to win. You body of believers wear this armor. It is what allows you to stand tall as you face the devil, it is what causes you to charge into battle, and it is what causes you to win. Fitted with the armor of God, you are the body of believers –standing tall. Amen

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1 Ephesians 6:10-20

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