

Luke 35 – God’s Soldiers

When a soldier joins the military, one of the first things he needs to learn is that his job is to obey orders. He is considered property of the United States government, and is treated as such. Boot camp is where soldiers are not only built up physically, but mentally as well. They are taught that they are to obey unquestioningly, for the good of the team and the United States of America. Though I did not serve in the US military, I have known many who have and heard stories of moving rocks from one place to the next, only to move them back the next day. This is to condition the mind into what the military wants from its soldiers, so that in a battle situation there is only obedience and the commanders can accomplish the task for which they fight.

In many ways, the Christian life is similar. We are not in a physical war or a battle, but a spiritual one. I personally do not believe that God ever intended Christians to form militias or to overthrow or fight the government. While God did mobilize an army in ancient Israel, we are not ancient Israel. We are the church, and our battle is not in the physical realm, but the spiritual realm. The Bible says as much in Ephesians 6:12: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” The Christian’s battle is a spiritual one, and so in the following verses of Ephesians 6, he describes the armor that a Christian should wear.

Ephesians 6:13-18 says “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” As we begin our study this morning, let us look briefly at this armor described.

The first piece of armor described is “the loins.” This was a belt that went around the waist of the soldier. On this belt hung the sword, a trumpet, or a bottle of water. It essentially kept the armor together. This belt is compared to truth. First, God’s truth means that He cannot lie, and that we can rely on His promises. Second, God’s truth means that we have a sturdy ground on which to stand. The never-changing truth of God is what gives us the confidence that we can fight every day and not wonder if things will drastically change. Third, it means that we have the truth of God’s word that binds all soldiers together in it. Often, the tunic that soldiers wore would be pulled between the legs and tucked into this belt, which means that truth is what keeps us from stumbling.

The second piece of armor described is the breastplate of righteousness. The breastplate was a metal covering that went over the chest. It protected the vital organs in the body, and was a powerful protection. This is compared to righteousness, or being right before God. When we walk in God’s righteous paths, that is a protection for us. Acts 10:35 says “in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.” The third piece is shoes. Shoes are important to a soldier so that he does not step on something in the battle which would impede his attack or retreat. Paul compares shoes to taking the Gospel around the world. This implies that when we are sent on a divine errand, we can be assured that God will prepare our ways for us. Proverbs 4:18 says: “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” This Gospel message is also a message of peace, which is a picture of a man running from the battlefield to the commander to tell him of victory, or to tell a village that the conquering king has extended peace to them.

The fourth piece of armor is a shield. Probably what was meant was a small shield that was strapped to the arm of a soldier to deflect anything thrown or shot at him. The end of the verse even mentions fiery darts, which were flaming arrows. Often soldiers would soak their shields in water and wrap thick leather around them so that when a flaming arrow came, it would extinguish in the wet fabric of the shield. The fiery darts, says Paul, are hurled by the enemy, or “the wicked,” which is a way of talking about Satan. This is clear in Matthew

13:19, which says: “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart.” Satan is not an enemy of our bodies, but of our souls and hearts. This shield is described as being the shield of faith. What is faith? Faith is believing the promises of God. Living by faith is living in the confidence of what God has promised: that He will take care of you and loves you. This is what will defend anyone against the attacks of evil spirits.

The fifth piece of armor is the helmet. While the breastplate protects the vital organs, a helmet protects an even more vital part of the body. You may survive an attack to your torso, but probably will not survive an attack to your head. Your head is symbolic of your mind and your emotions, which is again where Satan attacks. This is coupled with salvation. The Bible uses this metaphor in other places as well. 1 Thessalonians 5:8 says “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” The hope of salvation is what protects our thoughts and emotions. Often we as Christians look around us and despair of what is happening in life. Others more wicked than we thrive and flourish, while we feel as though we should have more. This is the nature of the lament found in Psalm 73. But in the middle of that Psalm, David says, “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.” The knowledge that David had of his salvation made him confident and protected him from attacks of Satan on his thoughts. The same is true for the Christian.

The sixth and final piece of armor is the sword, which is the only piece of offensive armor. It is with the sword that the soldier not only defends, but attacks. Christians ought to not only defend themselves against the attacks of Satan, but go to gain territory as well. Matthew 16:18 says “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” The phrase “gates of hell” imply not that we are being attacked, but that we are attacking. What is this sword? The Word of God. These are the promises, yes, but more so, the actual word of God: the Bible. The Bible is what God promises to use to not only help us defend, but to gain ground in the war against Satan, which brings us back to the point at which we are looking this morning. Paul says that our fight is not against other Christians, but against the spiritual forces behind them. We as Christians are in a fight, and in Ephesians 6, Paul says: “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.” You are in a fight!

Sadly, most Christians do not consider themselves so. Most Christians made a profession of faith at some point in life, looking only at the fact that they traded hell for heaven. Some are genuinely excited about having their sins forgiven, but others never even think about the fact that their lives are different. The Bible says: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Since God has made us new, we ought to consider that He has jurisdiction in our lives and that He has saved us for a purpose. Ephesians 2:10 says “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” Jesus saved us, not simply so that we could go to heaven, but so that we could live for Him. 1 Peter 2:9 says “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” We are His, and He has called us to fight. He wants to break us down so He can build us up.

It is this understanding of Scripture that undergirds the understanding of the next few passages in our study through the Gospel of Luke. Turn please to Luke 10. You remember from last time that Jesus called seventy disciples to Himself and sent them throughout the region, preaching the Gospel to all those cities into which they entered. He told them to take nothing extra for their journey, but to rely on God for all of their needs. He then condemned certain cities that had rejected both Him, His messengers, and the message that they were bringing. Verses 17-20 report that after these seventy disciples go out into the cities, they then return to Jesus to report on what they found, much as soldiers would to their commanding officer. This is the spiritual army of Jesus, going out to do battle with the forces of darkness. Luke 10:17-20 says this:

“And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” The Bible says first of all that the disciples, when they return, are filled with joy. They have probably not been accepted by all, but are still able to return with the joy of being able to represent their Master.

The Bible tells us why these men are so joyous. They tell Jesus: “Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.” They had been doing battle and had been winning. Evil spirits, who are more powerful than humans, had been subject to them. In the Old Testament we see what spirits, or angels, can do. 2 Kings 19:35 says “And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand.” In one night, one angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. The New Testament says that a group of demons in one individual gave him the ability to break chains. Spirits have powers that humans do not, but these men were making demands in the name of Jesus Christ. They would go into a town and even though they were weaker than the demons, were able to cast them out. For this, they were excited.

Jesus says to them two things. First he rejoices with them in their triumph over spirits. He says: “I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.” Scholars are divided as to what this means exactly. Some say that Jesus is recalling the day that He saw Satan fall from heaven. When this happened is not absolutely certain, since Satan appears in heaven in Job after His fall. We do know that Isaiah 14:12 says “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!” Revelation 12 talks about a great war in heaven, but never says when this battle takes place: in the future or in the past. It says: “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” This seems to indicate that it was in the future, but that does not explain why Jesus seems to indicate that it already happened. So it remains a mystery.

Other scholars say that this is symbolic for what Jesus is saying about their mission. He was telling them that Satan was dealt a mighty blow by their preaching. Not only were many demons cast out of their human homes, but hearts were changed at the news of the kingdom of God. The Kingdom was coming, and Satan was powerless to stop it. Satan falling as lightning means that the onslaught was such that he returned to the earth to help his demons defend his territory. This idea is present in John 12:31, which says “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” Jesus continues by saying: “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.” Again, some scholars suppose that the serpents and scorpions are literal creatures who are trying to harm the disciples. It is true that Satan often used literal creatures to inflict harm on Christians. Paul in Acts 28 was bitten by a viper, but shook it off into the fire.

However, others think that this is referring symbolically to the demon host. This is backed up by the fact that Jesus includes the phrase: “over all the power of the enemy.” If Jesus did not will them to be defeated, or even harmed, they would not be. This is not to say that Christians will never be harmed. We subscribe to a magazine that talks about how Christians are being persecuted around the world. Some are shot, some are burned, and some are beaten. They are in immense pain, though Jesus said here that disciples would not be hurt. The only logical conclusion is that on this particular mission, Jesus willed them to be free from pain and distress. Certainly this was not true for all Christians throughout the ages.

Paul himself says this in 2 Corinthians 11:24-26: “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in

the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren.” Jesus Himself said this to His disciples later: “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service.” Jesus never promised that Christians would never suffer harm all the time, but on certain occasions, He protects His people from injury. This was one of the those times.

However, despite the great victories, Jesus offers a warning to His soldiers. He says: “Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” Jesus was saying two things here. First, He was saying that they ought not let the ability to cast out demons allow them to think that they in themselves had any power to exorcise. They were not more powerful than the forces of evil in and of themselves, but only through the mission, power, and name of Jesus. Acts tells a story of those men who were not believers, but thought that they could cast out demons in Jesus’ name without His sanction. Acts 19:13-16 says: “Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”

Jude says that we ought not to think of ourselves as mightier than Satan’s forces in and of ourselves. He says: “Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.” If Michael the archangel of the LORD doesn’t rebuke Satan, reasons Jude, neither should we. Jesus is also saying that they should not rejoice in this triumph because it is short-lived. Satan has been defeated throughout the centuries of history, but always rebounds to wreak havoc on mankind again. Revelation even describes a time when Satan is bound and cast into the bottomless pit for a thousand years. You might think that a millennia of being bound would be sufficient proof to Satan that he is a defeated foe, but the Bible says that at the end of those thousand years Satan is loosed and he tries to deceive and gather the nations one last time before he is defeated finally forever.

Jesus says that rather than celebrating their power over Satan, they ought to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. The Bible indicates that in heaven there is a book called the Book of Life. It is a book in which are the names of those who belong to God. Revelation 19 talks about it and says: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.” It says in the next chapter: “And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.” The “Lamb’s” Book of Life indicates that it is those who have accepted God’s perfect Lamb, Jesus. This is a cause of rejoicing, since their names can never be blotted or removed from this book.

Jesus Himself rejoices in the next few verses, and Luke says this: “In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is, but the Father; and who the Father is, but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him.” Jesus, the Bible says, “rejoiced in the spirit.” Everything that Jesus did was by the power of the Spirit of God, and He rejoices in the Spirit now. He rejoices, not for Himself, but for what God is doing on the earth. He is using, not the mighty men on the earth, but common, everyday people who will simply trust Him for what He is doing.

It is true that God uses the weak things in life to magnify Himself. Jesus came, not to be served, but to serve. He says as much in Matthew 20:28: “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” Jesus came to be lowly, to give us an example. We as Christians are called upon live a life of sacrifice for Jesus. This is not to say that we cannot ever have nice things, but that our trust ought not be in those nice things, but in God. Colossians 3:2 says “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Our eyes should be on what our Master has for us, not for what we can get. When a person humbles himself to this level, God can then use him.

Jesus made it clear to His disciples that this was the intention. He said in Matthew 18:4: “Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.” He said in Matthew 23:12: “And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.” He said in Matthew 19:30: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.” He provided an example in John 13 by washing the disciples’ feet, which was a job done only by the lowest of servants. Jesus laid aside his garments, washed the disciples feet with the towel he was wearing, and then said to them: “Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

Jesus says that the way up is down. Humble yourself and God will exalt you to the place He wants you to be. No doubt there are many who enter basic training in the military with aspirations. Some want to be a general, others a pilot or a specialist of some kind. However, the best way to achieve what you want is to want what the army wants for you. If you assert your will at the onset, you will never make it far enough to accomplish your goals. They do not want someone who cannot take orders. The same is true for the Christian life in that you must allow God to form your will to His, not the other way around. You must say with Jesus, “Not my will, but thine be done.” Then you are called upon to obey. Adoniram Judson was a man who could have done many wonderful things in his life. He was intelligent and charming, and had a promising career in America pulpits. However, he gave that up for God’s will, and went to Burma to suffer and die as a missionary. Yet because of his surrender, God brought many Burmese to Jesus.

Jesus not only thanks God for using weak people, but thanks Him for revealing Himself at all. It is true that God has chosen the weak of the world to represent Him. He says in 1 Corinthians 1:19-21: “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” However, this is to say nothing of the weak of the world, as though they had some kind of extra-sensory perception.

This revelation came from God Himself, not from the invention of man. There are some who maintain that the concept of God or a supernatural being is an invention of mankind to help control mankind. However, there is in every person an innate knowledge of something beyond the natural world. Looking all around us, a natural question is: From where did all this come? It is proof of the light of God’s existence that He has put in all of us. God is the One who must then reveal Himself to us. He is not an invention of man. 2 Peter 1 says “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty... for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The idea of God and the Bible did not come from mankind, but from a supernatural God who revealed Himself to us. This is what Jesus is saying in verse 22. God must reveal Jesus to us as well, as it says in Acts 16:14: “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” This, again, is the plan of God: to reveal Himself to those who will honor Him, not themselves.

The next two verses give Jesus' final words about this revelation. He says in Luke 10:23-24: "And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." The revelation of God has been little by little throughout the centuries. Adam and Eve knew very little about the Plan of God except that He would one day send a man to conquer the power of Satan and sin. Eve even thought that her first son was that man, but he was not. Later generations started to gather more pieces as God revealed Himself to the nation of Israel and various individuals. Gradually they knew that this One sent by God would be the king over all the earth, and that eventually the Gentiles would be let into the kingdom as well. They knew that the Messiah would suffer and die at the hands of the Gentiles, and that His death would be a sacrifice for sins. These came in pieces.

Jesus is reminding His disciples that they are at the apex of revelation. He says: "many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them." He tells them to think about King David, and how he would have longed to see the things that they have seen. David would have loved to see the one He called in Psalm 110 "my lord" and in Psalm 2 "the Son." Isaiah, though he wrote about Jesus, would have loved to have seen him and hear Him preach. Isaiah had written: "As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men," but would have loved to see that visage himself. Yet Isaiah lived in a time that was not when Jesus would come. Jesus did come for another 700 years after Isaiah, which makes the prophecies about Him even more wonderful.

The time that Jesus came was the perfect point in history. Here is what Galatians 4:4 says "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son..." God sent Jesus at the precise right time. It was a time when the empire was unified politically under Rome and culturally under Greece. It was a time that the message could be spread throughout the known world. While there were those in the past who wanted to hear these things, there were many more who needed to hear these things, and Jesus was building an army to send them out. He was preparing a great people to proclaim His Word, and if you have trusted Jesus as your Saviour, you are a part of that army. It is high time that you start acting like a soldier of Christ. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:3-4: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." You are part of God's army, and you cannot shirk your duties as one.

Friend, it may be that you have never trusted Christ as your Saviour. It could be that you are still in the power of the enemy of God, that you are still in your sins. Today, this very morning, you can repent of those sin and trust Jesus as your Saviour. You can receive the gift of God's love to you and trust in Jesus as your Saviour. The Bible says in Romans 10:9-10: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." You can have Jesus as your Saviour today. Won't you turn to Him for salvation? If you have any questions about this or anything else, please feel free to contact us. You can do so in the following ways:

You can stop by our church building, which is located at 909 W. 8th St., by the softball diamonds. You can call us at 732-3321. You can E-mail us at church@fbcpr.org. That's CHURCH at F B C P R dot O R G. Or you can log on to our website, which is www.fbcpr.org. If you would like to have a copy of this broadcast, either in audio or transcript form, you can find it on our website tomorrow. If you enjoy this program, let us know by contacting our church. Please join us this morning at 10:30 for our worship service. Please join us again next week for the Way of Truth Radio Broadcast, brought to you by the First Baptist Church of Park Rapids, MN.