



Moving Forward

Where Are You Going?

Last year we took our daughter to college and although I fundamentally knew the way to get there, I relied on Google Maps for directions. Before I realized what was happening, we were going on a roundabout loop, far out in the outskirts of the L.A. basin on highways I had never traveled in previous trips to Southern California. The way back, we were guided to take a completely different route that was a much straighter line to our home. What was the difference? Going there, we were directed to avoid terrible traffic and although it was further in mileage, it was shorter in time. What was encouraging to me in a strange way was that on the circuitous route, we were always moving forward, always heading toward our destination. We never got lost, we always were where we needed to be despite how outrageous and how misguided the directions seemed to be. You have access to something that is just like an app that takes you along, that moves you forward, and it is the object of our discussion today as we go over the third part of the armor of God. Our Big Idea: boldly go where the Gospel of Peace takes you!

Here is the key verse we are examining. **Stand firm then.. with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.** (Ephesians 6: 14a,15 NIV) Perhaps this translation is more understandable and helpful. **Stand firm then...having sandaled the feet in preparation for the gospel of peace.** As I have mentioned before, the symbolic meaning of the various parts of armor described in this section of Scripture is not always easy to unwrap and sometimes rather imaginative but not necessarily accurate interpretations have been given. Here though the metaphor of having your feet sandaled, so you are ready to get moving is rather obvious. Before going any further, let me provide some background to this matter of peace and more precisely, the Gospel of Peace. Earlier in Ephesians, Paul gives context to why the Gospel of Peace is so important. He notes, **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.** (Ephesians 2: 1-3 NIV) That is the grave situation. Every one of us at one time have been dead spiritually due to our sin and we without giving much thought to it willy-nilly followed the lifestyle Satan promotes, the way of thinking of those who are disconnected from God and in rebellion to His word.

Today we will examine two of the three levels of division brought about by sin. The first, and at the time, the most obvious, was the separation between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. The Jews had the Law and all of its regulations. Because of it, they could never connect with those outside the Law. It was always us vs. them. The crisis in the Middle East is nothing new. There is a violent demarcation that exists and it will never be settled by diplomacy or peace initiatives. It is only the Gospel of Peace that can bring permanent and real change. Paul explains that when Jesus died on the cross, a monumental transformation occurred, something completely unexpected and rarely contemplated deeply. **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.** (Ephesians 2: 13-16 NIV)

Jesus, by dying on the cross miraculously, supernaturally eliminated the law and its regulations from the equation of relationships between the Jews and non-Jews. The psychological and sociological barrier at the heart of the animosity was done away with by Jesus Christ. The law is no longer the basis for the Jew's identity nor the violation of the law the basis of the identity of non-Jews. It is not the law and how we respond to it that identifies us. It is completely our response to Jesus Christ and the salvation He brings that marks us. Either we have eternal life and the forgiveness of all of our sins or we don't. That is the sole us or them demarcation. The basis of peace between all people is the salvation Christ brings those who put their faith in Him for the forgiveness of sin and eternal life. It is no longer what you do or the culture you embrace that decides if you are one but the presence of Christ living in and through you that determines your oneness. The Bible states it this way. **Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.** (Ephesians 2: 19-20 NIV)

There is a second point of division and that is within you. Paul outlines perfectly the situation inside those who have no salvation in Christ. **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.** (Ephesians 2: 1-2 NIV) That is your condition before you are born again through faith in Christ as your Savior. You do whatever you wish without regard for God. The happiest people in the world are often in this state, their minds in complete harmony, enjoying practical atheism. Satan has them in his grip, oblivious to heaven and eternal life and the judgment to come. But then a shock wave hits. The marriage falls apart, a DUI arrest, cancer strikes, relationships at school unravel, a financial collapse occurs, and you find yourself needing a savior of some sort. Paul describes the division inside you perfectly as the realization becomes clear that you are empty within. You know there is a better way, a right way but you can't reach it. **I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.** (Romans 7:15-20 NIV)

When the crisis hits, and it may be a relatively small one, but when it comes and you realize that without a Savior, you are broken and your life is lost as it is, you are met by Jesus. The Gospel of Peace is offered to you and you either receive Jesus and the pure and unbreakable love He offers you or you don't. The Gospel of Peace is spelled out in Scripture. **For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.** (Ephesians 2: 8-9 NIV) Let me offer you the clearest and most eloquent example of how far the Gospel of Peace takes you. Here is the snapshot of one of the most self-assured and confident people you will ever meet. He wasn't though a very nice guy. **Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.** (Acts 9: 1-2 NIV) Saul, as he was known at the time, was happy with who he was as far as we can tell but he was filled with hatred that was decimating his personality. It was only after he became a Christian and Christ, like he does with all of us who are born again, came and lived in him and changed him within that the anger and bitterness washed out of him and he became radically new. Here was the Gospel of Peace moving forward.

Several years later, Paul and his fellow missionary were arrested because they cast a demon out of a slave girl whose fortune telling brought her owners a significant income.irate, they used their influence to gather a crowd to attack Paul and Silas. **The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. Upon receiving such orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.** (Acts 16: 22-24 NIV) Most would be bitter and despairing of life, but not Paul and Silas who had been transformed by the Gospel of Peace. This is how they responded to the terrible treatment they received. **About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them.** (Acts 16: 25 NIV) How do you go from wanting everyone dead who do not agree with you to having such peace that after a severe beating and false imprisonment you are joyfully singing hymns of praise? It was the Gospel of Peace.

The Gospel of Peace is the active work of God to save each person from Sin. It is not a passive conceptualization of a better world. It is the aggressive work of Jesus Christ dying on the Cross to bring salvation to the world. ...to you. **But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.** (Ephesians 2: 4-5 NIV) The Gospel of Peace is the uncompromising movement of God in the world and it is forward moving. With Christ in you, transforming you and conforming you to the very sort of personality He possesses, the Gospel of Peace becomes just as much yours as it is His. The Gospel of Peace with Christ in you will take you to people and places where God wants to offer His love and hold those who have given up on life or lost their hope in a better life. Our Big Idea: Boldly go where the Gospel of Peace takes you! It is the greatest treasure you possess and the best gift you can share with anyone God brings you!