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Message: The Year of Living Dangerously – Breastplate of Righteousness

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Date: 1.17.10

The Year of Living Dangerously

This January we've been unpacking Ephesians 6, which talks about spiritual warfare. It says there's much more going on than what meets the eye. There's actually a spiritual battle going on, against an enemy that seeks to destroy you, destroy your marriage, destroy your family, and destroy your faith. We should never underestimate the resolve of our spiritual enemy. He's been committed to his cause for thousands of years. We would be foolish to think we could battle him without protection and stand. God's word says we need to put on the armor of God for the battle, **Ephesians 6:10-17**. Last week we looked at the belt of truth and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. This week let's learn about the breastplate of righteousness. **Let's pray.**

Breastplate of righteousness

To the Roman soldier, the breastplate was essential armor that protected the vital organs. Typically made of brass, it covered the chest, abdomen and back. In hand to hand combat where the primary weapons were spears and knives, the breastplate was essential protection. The word of God says, for protection in the spiritual battle against the attacks of the enemy, put on the breastplate of righteousness.

Now, when you read that your mind might automatically go to the doing of righteous deeds. So that interpretation would say, 'to do battle with your spiritual enemy, protect yourself with the goodness of your life.' I hope we all see from Scripture today, that's a totally flawed battle plan. If our protection is our own righteous living, we're all in big trouble. Now, I'm sure you're a really good person because we check at the door and only let good people in, but still, you're not good enough to protect yourself from the attacks of our spiritual enemy. That's taking a knife to a gun fight. You're going to lose.

The good news is, there is a righteousness that will serve as perfect protection against the enemy. So the aim today is to figure out what this breastplate of righteousness is, and put it on, because it will work.

Righteousness...means doing what is right and just. God is perfect in righteousness, and always acts in perfect justice. Here's the problem, you and I don't. We sin. We fall short of what is right. The Greek word for sin is hamartia, it's an archery term, it means to miss the mark. Every one of us has missed the mark. We're unrighteous. And you may think, *'Sure, I've missed the mark sometimes, but I've hit the mark more than I missed it. I've done more good than bad. So generally speaking, I'm righteous.'* Let me just respond bluntly, no you're not, and neither am I.

If all of your sin, or all of my sin, would be played on the big screen in here for all to see, do you know where we would find you in about 30 seconds, curled up in a ball, hiding your face in the corner in shame. And the people of Mission would be shocked. We'd be covering the ears and eyes of our children, to protect them from seeing the vileness of your sin. People would be leaving the room in droves, feeling the shame of seeing such disgusting things in church. You would never come back here again, because you'd be so ashamed of what we now know about you. And that's from us, your fellow sinners, who have in one form or fashion done the exact same things as you. If you would hide in shame from us, How much more when all your sin is exposed before a perfectly righteous God? The person who thinks he's basically a good person is clearly not dealing in reality. (ready for another old fashioned bible study?)

Isaiah 59:1,2...our sin, our missing of the mark of righteousness, separates us from God. Our sin is so shameful, God hides his face from it. Please people, don't minimize your sin. Don't convince yourself it's no big deal. See it as God sees it. It's hideous. It's so ugly God has to hide his holy face from it. Left to ourselves, we are not beautiful righteous people, we are grossly deformed by our sin and fully unrighteous.

If you're new to Mission, we want you to know, we think you're hideous...but so are we...welcome. The fact is every one of us falls short of God's standard, **Isaiah 59:12-16a**. Maybe you read that and think, *man they sure could have used me then*. No, no, you and I would not have been the exception, we're unrighteous too. The apostle Paul put it this way, **there is no one righteous, not even one**. Not you, not me, not mother Theresa, not the pope, not Billy Graham, not Tim Tebow, not the apostle Paul, none of us, not one.

So here's the quandary we find ourselves in, God is righteous, but we are not. God can't just sweep all the sin of Mark Connelly under the rug and pretend it never happened, that would be unrighteous on his part. My sin must be judged and condemned, and so must yours. If my plan is to put on the breastplate of my own righteousness, and trust in that to protect me, I'm in big trouble. I need a righteousness that doesn't come from me. **Isaiah 59:16, 17**. That's our only hope, that God himself, his own arm, is going to have to work salvation for us. His own righteousness is going to have to win the day for us. Let's see how he did it.

Romans 3:10-20, There's the biblical assessment again of who we really are. If you think the good outweighs the bad in your life, take a closer look at **verse 20**. An honest assessment should make everyone here aware of the hideousness of our sin. To think otherwise is delusional. It's like seeing the devastation of Haiti and saying 'that's not so bad.' It's horrifying, and to think anything less is delusional.

When we get honest with ourselves about our sin, we stop asking questions like, *why doesn't God save everyone?* And we start asking questions like, *why are any of us saved?* God, how can you possibly love Mark Connelly? How can you not just continually hide your face from me in disgust? How is it possible for me to be in your presence? My only hope and your only hope, is for the arm of

God to provide salvation for us, for him to somehow apply a righteousness to us that doesn't come from us.

Here's how he did just that, **Romans 3:21-24**. A righteousness, apart from your ability to live up to the law of God, has come. It's from God, for all who have faith in Jesus Christ. Here's how...**3:25-26**.

Justice was fully served against all our sin...in the body of Jesus, on the cross. He took our debt upon himself, and bore it in his body. He is our substitutionary sacrifice who atoned for our sins on the cross. Here's the miracle of grace...through faith in the blood of Jesus, our unrighteousness is removed, and we receive a righteousness not of our own, but a righteousness given to us from God, the very righteousness of Christ.

Do you see what happened, God's own arm worked salvation for us. His own righteousness sustained us. The protective breastplate of righteousness that fends off the attack of the spiritual enemy is not our righteousness; that would be worthless armor. The breastplate of righteousness we're given to stand in the battle victoriously, is the very righteousness of Christ.

Let's see why this breastplate of righteousness is so important for the spiritual battle. Last week we saw the spiritual enemy uses lies as a weapon against us is, lies of greener grass, easy money, addiction under control, and on and on. Here's another thing we need to know about the enemy, he's an accuser of the followers of Jesus. He's pointing at you and me and saying, *'Look God at the evil things Mark Connelly did to people in his life, look at the lies he spoke, look at the lust in his heart, look at the arrogance. God, this one, is vile and guilty.'* And he's right! When the enemy accuses us he doesn't need to lie, there's plenty of true material to pull from. In the end, the only way I'll overcome the accusations of the spiritual enemy, is by the protective breastplate of righteousness that comes not from me, but from God himself.

That exact scene is actually played out for us in Scripture...**Revelation 12:10-11a**, in the end Jesus ultimately destroys the enemy and establishes his kingdom. But until that point, the enemy is really busy accusing the followers of Jesus, pointing the finger at us continually. *'Look at this loser (sorry to pick on you), if you're a righteous God, how can you possibly not judge this one and find him guilty.'* Look at how we overcome those accusations of the enemy. We overcome by the blood of the lamb. Jesus is the lamb of God, who paid in full for our unrighteousness by his blood on the cross. With our mouths we confess Jesus is our Lord, that's our testimony. That's our response to the accusations of the enemy, not 'innocent.' No, our response is *'guilty, but paid in full and made righteous through my Lord Jesus.'* Only by his righteousness will we overcome the accusations of the enemy.

Listen, if you have this picture in your mind of how it's gonna go down in the end, where you're standing before God and the enemy is like, *'I've got some dirt on this guy, but honestly he's one of your better ones, so you should probably find him innocent. I don't really have enough on him.'* And you think God is going to look at you like, *'ya, you're probably right, come on into my kingdom, you've earned it.'* If that's the picture you have, that's wacked out. The enemy is going to point the

finger at you and fire away all the ammunition he has...all the times you fell into his traps and you turned your back on God, all the times you exchanged the truth of God for a lie, all the times you bit the apple of temptation. And it's all going to be true. And it's all hideous in the sight of a holy, righteous God. In that moment, responding to God, who sees and knows all, with the plea 'not guilty,' will be tragically laughable.

I hope that's not your plan. I hope nobody in this room is planning a plea of not guilty before God, because that's a breastplate of paper. That won't protect you at all. Your only hope and my only hope of overcoming the accusations of our enemy is to be protected by, covered in, surrounded by the perfect righteousness of Christ.

So God tells us in his word, to stand in the battle, put on the breastplate of his righteousness, and you'll stand firm to the end. I'm sure there are people sitting in the room right now and you've never put it together like this before. You've been coming to church because that's what good people do. I get it, I've been there. You're here because you're adding to the pile of good in your life that you think will outweigh the pile of bad. Today I hope you hear loud and clear, you'll never be good enough. Not on your own. Neither will I. Today, I hope above all things that you'll stop putting your trust in your own righteousness, which is nothing, and put your faith in the only righteousness that will stand in the end, the righteousness of Christ.

Can I speak for a minute to those of you who know Christ. If you're like me you have this errant default setting in your brain. There's this thing in me that keeps defaulting to wrong thinking about grace and righteousness. When I sin I default to believing I have to earn my way back into grace, I have to earn back righteous.

Here's the danger for those who slip into that default setting and start thinking you need to earn our righteousness back...if you don't change the setting, you'll end up either **exhausted or prideful**. Exhausted from trying to achieve something you can never achieve, or prideful believing you've achieved something you haven't. If you feel like you're jumping through religious hoops to keep God happy with you, you're on a path to spiritual exhaustion. You can't make God love you more. Your righteousness is not self-created, it's the righteousness of Christ...rest in that truth.

On the other hand, if you find yourself questioning God because he hasn't given you what you've requested and prayed for, you've become prideful. Somewhere along the way you started believing God owed you something other than wrath for your sin. That's prideful. Our response to God, no matter what comes our way, should be simple thankfulness for the incredible gift of righteousness given to us.