



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 15, 2024

Pastor David Ruddat

17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [1 Kings 18:21-39](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 46 CW<sup>93</sup>

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Ephesians 6:10-18](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Mark 9:14-27](#)

### **The Need for Followership** **Followers of Christ are Armed for the Battle** **CHRISTIAN SOLDIER'S HANDBOOK**

1. **Our Captain gives us \_\_\_\_\_.**
2. **Our true enemy schemes to turn us \_\_\_\_\_.**
3. **Our effective equipment is \_\_\_\_\_.**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace are yours from God our Father through our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.

*Direct us now, O gracious Lord, to hear aright your Holy Word.  
Assist your minister to preach, and let the Holy Spirit teach.  
Let eternal life be found by all who hear the Gospel sound. Amen.*

In the name of Jesus, dear fellow soldier's, all of us, young or old, male or female, are called to be soldiers of Christ. It is a calling that requires vigilance. It's a calling that requires preparation. It's a calling that requires sacrifice. So as we all have this call to be a soldier of Christ, let's look at the **Christian Soldier's Handbook**. We are going to look at our Captain. We are going to look at our true enemy. And we are going to look at our effective equipment.

When Paul wrote this letter to the Ephesians, he was under guard. He was in prison. Roman soldiers were guarding him. So having a picture of them, of being a soldier, would be something that would be very pertinent to the apostle Paul in his time and also pertinent to the people that he was writing to because of the Roman Empire. I'd like to be able to say that Roman soldiers and Roman armor is something that we can't really associate, but then we're living in a time when guys are thinking about the fall of

the Roman Empire all the time. If guys are thinking about the fall of the Roman Empire all the time, you can bet dollars to donuts that on YouTube you are going to find guys who are making Roman armor and reenacting Roman battles. So if you want to learn all about what it was like to be a Roman soldier to give you context for what Paul is talking about in Ephesians, you could type that in.

A soldier needs a leader, a captain, to guide and direct them to the battle. If there is no leader, there is confusion and chaos for the soldier doesn't know what the objectives are or the plan. So a captain unites the individuals under his cause and his banner and gives them the objective. Our Captain is Jesus. He is a veteran of many battles with the same enemy that we face. He unites us together, giving us marching orders and objectives. Not only is he our Captain, but he is the source of our strength. *Our Captain gives us strength.* As Paul puts it, ***"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."***

I like the apostle Paul saying what he says here because if you're thinking about battles and you're thinking about vigilance and you have to have be ready for battle, it has us looking inward, and this reminds us that our strength to fight in the battle as a soldier of Christ doesn't come from within. It comes from Christ, our Captain, who gives us the objective, who gives us marching orders, who also gives us strength. That's why the apostle Paul says, ***"...be strong..."*** With those very words, he is equipping us with the strength that we need to be soldiers. It's not saying "You have to be strong" or "Become strong somehow." He says ***"...be strong..."*** and you are; not in your strength, but in Christ.

This really forms the rest of this section as he is talking about putting on the armor of God and talking about our enemies. It really starts with our Captain, who is the source of our strength.

The enemy that we engage is not a physical enemy, and this is important. ***"Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."*** This is our enemy. So oftentimes we forget who our true enemy is. When you're engaging with another person where there is an adversarial relationship, maybe a family member or a former friend or a co-worker where it is adversarial, it gets us into thinking that *this person is what I'm fighting against*. The apostle Paul tells us our enemy is a spiritual one. It's not an individual. This is important for us as we are in this political adversarial arena that we are in. It's always the other guys are the enemy and we are the good guys. It doesn't matter which side you're on. The apostle Paul reminds us, our enemy isn't physical. Our enemy is spiritual. He mentions them. ***"...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."***

But why are these spiritual forces fighting against God in the first place? Why is there this good and evil thing? We are in the Star Wars culture where there is the light side and the dark side. The dark side needs the light and the light side needs the dark, and they complement each other. You can't have one without the other. If that's what good and evil is like, that we need evil in order for good to be good, why is it that there is this confrontational force between God and the devil and those evil angels? Why is there this battle? The Bible tells us and the spiritual enemy that we have is much closer than we think.

Think of what caused the devil and his evil angels to fall. They were given positions of authority and the Bible tells us that pride was their downfall. Pride is an emotion. It's not evil in and of itself, but what does pride often do? It leads us to look inward. "Look at me. Look at how great I am." Pride led to the downfall of the devil and his evil angels and they rebelled against God. When Satan came to Adam and Eve, what was his temptation to them? "You have to look out for yourself! Did God really say...? Are you serious? God says you can't eat from that tree? What is God keeping from you? YOU are smarter than him. You can become like him. You can become as wise as he is. You'll know good and evil like he does. He is holding out on you! You have to look out for yourself!" Whew! That's much closer than we want to admit. It isn't wrong for us to feel confident in ourselves, but it isn't very far away from feeling confident in ourselves to be thinking inward. "Everything is about ME. Everyone is here for ME." I think each one of us has a sinful nature that is inward focused. Our spiritual enemy is having us look inward. *Our true enemy schemes to turn us inward.*

When God created the world, God was completely opposite of that. He creates the world and gives a beautiful garden for Adam and Eve and said "This is YOURS. Rule it. Watch over it. It's yours to enjoy." God doesn't need the sunrises and the sunsets. He puts them there for us to enjoy. How unselfish is that! Then when Adam and Eve sinned, he promises to send them a Savior. Why? He does it because he is unselfish! He is not doing things for himself. It doesn't hurt him in any way to wipe out all of creation and start all over again. But he cares for someone else, for others, he is going outward.

Just in our Gospel Lesson we see Jesus as well. As he is frustrated with an unbelieving generation, as he is frustrated with the sinful world and these sinful human beings, he is recognizing he is not fighting individuals. He is fighting a spirit that is focusing us inward. He still helps that boy. He still helps that father. He encourages that father to believe in him. ***"If you can?" said Jesus.*** Is that a little sarcastic? ***"If you can?" said Jesus.*** ***"Everything is possible for one who believes."*** "If you believe in me," Jesus said, "I'll do this for you."

It is only by God's power that you and I are turning away from ourselves and turning outward to others. As Paul finishes off this section, he talks about praying, not just for

ourselves, but praying for others. ***“At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition. Stay alert for the same reason, always persevering in your intercession for all the saints.”*** This is outwardly praying for others. That can only happen if God gives us a new heart; a heart that reflects who God is, this unselfish Lord who loves unconditionally. That can only happen if we have Jesus as our Captain, who loved us unconditionally, and works faith in our heart through his Word and Sacrament to get us to think outward rather than inward.

Now let’s look at this effective armor and equipment that our Savior Jesus gives us. ***“For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*** Look at all this equipment that he talks about. He ties it to a spiritual component. Ask yourself; is there one thing that’s more important than the other? Or is there one piece of that equipment that we could do without? Can we do without truth or salvation or the Gospel or righteousness that he gives us? Can we do without any of those things and still be able to take on the evil forces of this world and the evil force within that is turning us inward?

This last week we had that first commercial space walk that happened. I bet you dollars to donuts again that if you were to go to those astronauts and say “Which part of that equipment that you were wearing could you have done without? Which part was unnecessary and superfluous? Which piece of that equipment could you do without?” They are going to say “We need it all!”

I think that’s true for us as well. When it comes to the armor of God, we need it all because by nature, if we are left by ourselves, we are going to be inward focused. The devil’s attempts at getting us thinking about me, myself, and I are going to win every time. We need Jesus to equip us with armor, with his armor, because our righteousness isn’t going to be enough. Our truth is always seemingly subjective. Our salvation is something we can’t do on our own. Being ready to share the Gospel with somebody else is not something we are naturally inclined to do. Our faith isn’t something we do ourselves. The Word of God is something that we oftentimes don’t spend enough time in so that we can wield it properly. We know our fantasy football rosters and we can navigate Google and all those social media things but we can’t navigate the Word of God because we don’t spend any time in God’s Word. We need Christ and his armor because so often we are vulnerable.

Now just take a moment to consider how when Jesus was on the cross, how many pieces of armor did he have there? He was completely vulnerable. He didn't have a helmet of salvation. He had a crown of thorns. Salvation wasn't something that he had and possessed because **God made him who had no sin to be sin for us...** [\(2 Corinthians 5:21\)](#) He didn't have a belt of truth because the truth of the matter was he was perfect. Yet God was treating him like a sinner. A breastplate of righteousness?—he had a breast that was filled with blood because his righteousness was taken from him and given to us. Yet even in that weak and vulnerable state that Jesus was in on the cross, he did that for you. He rose from the dead, having defeated the devil, defeated the spiritual forces of this world, defeated sin and its curse, and now he gives us what he won—the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth.

The truth is you are God's dear child that he loved so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to die for you and that heaven is yours. You have that helmet of salvation because of what he has done. Because of Christ, the Gospel message that we have to proclaim is not ourselves or Morrison Zion but Jesus Christ in him for us. Our armor is effective because it's not our own. *Our effective equipment is Christ.* He was given to us because of his grace.

We are living in a world that wants to have fights and battles, but the world's battles and fights want to be protecting our own interests and our own rights. Where Christians come from when it comes to being a soldier of Christ is a completely different arena. We are fighting a battle not against human beings but against evil forces which are always directing our hearts inwardly. But dear soldier, you've been given your handbook. Your Captain is Jesus, who is the source of your strength. Your true enemy is revealed. You know who you're fighting now. You are fighting that propensity to be turned inward and selfish and your effective equipment is given to you in God's Word. Christ still is your Captain. He still is your righteousness. He still is your armor. And he still is your victory. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.