Stand strong in gospel shoes

Ephesians 6:15

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Romans 10:14-18; Ephesians 6:10-20

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 262, 62, 533, 461, 487

Series: Spiritual warfare (#3)

Theme: Be strong in the Lord and ready for battle by keeping your feet firmly planted in the truth of the gospel.

Proposition: Put on your gospel shoes so that you can stand strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.

**Introduction**

This sermon is the third in a series about spiritual warfare which looks in detail at the whole armour of God, piece by piece. The Apostle Paul reveals the nature of the struggle which has been raging since our common ancestors Adam and Eve fell into sin and rebellion against God (Gen 3:15). He writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to the Ephesian Christians: “*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.*” (Eph 6:10-12).

In the first sermon we focused on the **belt of truth** and saw that the true truth of God enables us to be ready to fight the spiritual battles we face with confidence in Christ who has already won the ultimate victory over the Devil (John 16:33; 1 Cor 15:57). In the second sermon we looked at the **breastplate of righteousness** and saw that the piece of spiritual equipment protects our feelings, emotions, desires and will from the crafty trickery of the Devil.

Now our attention is directed towards **shoes for your feet**, what they represent and why they are so vital in spiritual warfare. So firstly…

1. **Shoes for your feet**

You probably have quite a variety of shoes. I have a range of footwear including running shoes, tramping boots and sandals. I also have a pair of metal crampons that I can strap into my climbing boots to enable me to get a firm grip if I am up in the mountains on ice. I’ve never tried to put my crampons onto my sandals, but if I did, it would look a little like what a Roman solider used to wear back in the 1st century AD when Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians. The regular foot soldiers were known as Caligati because they wore special sandals called caliga – which were thickly studded with projecting cleats on the bottom. Like my crampon spikes these caliga enabled the solider to plant his feet firmly into the ground and thereby to stand strong in battle.

On a hot summer day it’s pleasant to walk around the garden barefoot, but there’s always the risk of stepping on something sharp like a thorn, or some tool that has been left lying in the grass. A common military strategy in ancient times was to plant sticks in the ground which had been sharpened to a point, burying them just beneath the surface of the ground so that they could not be easily seen. This tactic was used to disable the enemy because, if the soldier’s foot was pierced, he could not walk well and if he was not mobile, he could not fight strongly. The thick soled caliga sandals protected a soldier’s feet from injury so that he was ready to stand his ground and fight.

The words in Ephesians 6:15 are not so easy to understand, they follow on from verse 14: *Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and,* ***as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace***. There is a possible a link here back to the Old Testament image in Isaiah 52:7: ‘*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns*"’ The Apostle Paul refers to this in Romans 10:15, writing there: "*How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!*" Noting this, some have taken the message of Ephesians 6:15 to be that the Christian soldier should be ready to go out to defend and spread the gospel.

Whilst this it is true that all who believe in Christ are commissioned to go and make other disciples (Matt 28:16) and to be prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks them for a reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15), this is not the message of this reference to shoes. The imagery which Paul uses here is of the Christian soldier standing strongly against the schemes of the Devil, it is not a picture of advancing forward with the gospel. This interpretation of the purpose of the shoes is confirmed by the word translated ‘readiness’ was used in classical Greek in the sense of being established or having a firm foundation. These ‘shoes’ are not like trail runners for skipping over mountain paths to deliver the good news of salvation, they are more like crampons on mountaineering boots which hold you firm on what would otherwise be slippery ice. Most of us don’t need spikey physical footwear but we do need these spiritual shoes which provide a firm grip, enabling us to stand strong in spiritual warfare. What then do these shoes represent? The answer is the heading for our second point:

1. **Peace for your soul**

As we’ve just heard, the grip on the Roman soldier’s battle sandals was provided by the spikes or cleats on the base of their footwear. Spiritually, what provides the stabilising grip for the Christian soldier to stand strong against the schemes of the Devil is ‘*the gospel of peace*’. The word peace here means to join together that which has been separated. You can think of this peace as being like a very strong contact adhesive which binds together the surfaces of two objects so that they become one whole unit. One of the ‘gospel glue’ words in Scripture is ‘reconciliation’ which means literally ‘being put into friendship’. It describes the repairing of a broken relationship – the making of peace after a quarrel or dispute.

Paul writes to the Corinthians about their new identity in Christ: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself…that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them*” (2 Cor 5:17-19). As a result of the work of Christ, we, brothers and sisters, *‘who were once far off have been brought near by his blood*’ (Eph 2:13). We who had been hostile to God, alienated from the source of life and under His righteous judgement and condemnation have entered into a friendly close relationship as His beloved children.

As human beings made in God’s image, we are designed for friendship and fellowship with our Creator. The peace which Christ’s warfare on our behalf has won for us repairs what sin and rebellion have broken. Imagine that you visit your doctor because you know that something is wrong with your body. Perhaps it’s a broken bone, an organ like your heart, kidneys or lungs which are not working properly, or you are in chronic pain. Imagine how you would feel your doctor said to you ‘we can fix that so that you will be completely whole and well again’. You’d be overjoyed at such good news!

‘Good news’ or ‘glad tidings’ is the meaning of the word ‘gospel’. The ‘gospel of peace’ here is the good news that, for all who are new creations in Christ, their broken, hostile relationship with God has been fully repaired. The result of this state of peace is that they can become completely whole and well again spiritually. In addition, there is the promise that when their bodies are resurrected from the dead, they will be fully restored physically to perfect bodily health. In this life, the gospel of peace results in peace for the saved sinner’s soul. This is the inner peace which ‘*surpasses all understanding*’ and ‘*guards the hearts and minds of those who are in Christ Jesus’* (Phil 4:7).

The shoes which provide a firm foundation in spiritual warfare is the inner peace of heart and mind which results from the good news of the peace which Christ has won for us, brothers and sisters, by reconciling us to God. We can be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might when we stand in the confidence of being assured that God, who was once our enemy when we were dead in our sins, is now our Defender. We can hold our ground as we wrestle against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places when our feet are firmly rooted on the sure foundation of the peace we have with God. This provides us with great stability for the battle, as we’ll see in our third point.

1. **Stability for the battle**

If you want to see a Himalayan mountain goat in the wild you don’t need to travel to Asia. In 1904 these mountain goats – tahr - were released into the Southern Alps of New Zealand for recreational hunting purposes. Tahr are able to grasp both smooth and rocky surfaces with their toes and the rubber-like core of their hooves. As a result they can move confidently and swiftly over very steep terrain. They are like the sure-footed deer which the prophet Habakkuk writes about at the end of the Bible book named after him. His situation in life was very difficult.

The Lord revealed to Habakkuk that He would send the ferocious Babylonian army to conquer Israel, but that in the midst of His divine judgement, the righteous would live by faith (Hab 2:4). Habakkuk knew that tough times were coming in which there would be great suffering and loss for God’s people. Yet He determined to rejoice in the Lord knowing that the Lord was his strength. His last recorded words of faith are: “*GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places*” (Hab 3:19). We could say that Habakkuk, who trusted in the sure Word of God, stood strong in gospel shoes, even though ‘*he did not receive the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar*’ (Heb 11:13).

This Old Testament prophet did not know the fulness of the gospel of peace as we do. He did not know the details of the victory of Christ over sin and death. His understanding of the future was limited to what God had revealed to him, just as our knowledge of what is yet to be is restricted to what we learn from Scripture.

Brothers and sisters, we know that we have peace with God through Jesus Christ because we are justified by faith in Him (Rom 5:1). We know that therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). We know that nothing and nobody can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 8:39). We know that Satan attempts to accuse us and to separate us from the love of Christ. He schemes and he plots to do us harm. He is dangerous, but not when we stand strong in the strength of the Lord, having put on the whole armour of God.

When we put on the shoes which provide a firm foundation upon which to stand, the gospel of peace, then we have a stable stance from which to stand against the schemes of the devil. How do you and I put these shoes on? By faith. By believing that we are truly reconciled to God in Christ. By believing that Jesus is our all-sufficient Saviour. By trusting that we have peace with God through Christ alone.

Brothers and sisters, stand strong in the gospel shoes which have been given to you in your struggle against the schemes of the devil. Put these on and you will be stable, at peace within yourself and well equipped for the days ahead.

AMEN.