CRAIG: Good morning, welcome to Mission Hills. Hey, before we jump into God’s word this morning, I just want to give you a little reminder that if you took one of those baby bottles a few weeks ago to help with Alternatives Pregnancy Center, we’re actually still finishing up collections, so there will be a collection today and if you forgot them today...I see a lot of panicked looks like, “Oh right,” it’ll actually be available next week. I really encourage you to go ahead and drop your spare change or bills into that and bring it back. We’ve actually already collected a really huge blessing for the Alternatives Pregnancy Center and their ministry, but I wanted to make sure everybody had a chance to respond. If you picked up those bottles, please drop them off next week.

So if you got your Bible, I’m going to ask you to join with me and turn to the end of the book of Ephesians, Chapter 6. If you’re kind of new to the Bible, you’re going to find that pretty close to the end actually. Not very far if you’re going towards the end and you come across 1st and 2nd Corinthians. Just go a little bit further, you get to Galatians and then Ephesians.

While you’re turning there, actually I want to talk a little bit about one of my favorite stories from the Old Testament. It’s a story of a man named Gideon who was given 300 soldiers to fight an army of tens of thousands. There’s kind of a twist to the story because when God basically led him and only gave him these 300 soldiers, your natural assumption is God’s going to do something way cool here. He’s going to do some kind of like Captain America miracle on those 300 soldiers. Going to get super heroes out of this, but that’s not the way it goes out. There’s this weird little twist. What God has them do is they scatter around the enemy army at night and they kind of infiltrate the army and at a certain point, they all start yelling and screaming and breaking stuff and the enemy army basically panics. They kind of freak out and they don’t know what’s going on and so they end up fighting each other and then Gideon and his 300 men just kind of come in and mop up the mess when the whole thing’s over.

It’s an interesting story and I think there’s a really important lesson we learn from it. You’ll probably say something like this, “That an army that has lost track of who they are fighting has already lost.” You hear me? An army that loses track of who they’re fighting has already lost. Really, that’s kind of the heartbeat of the message that Paul concludes the book of Ephesians with. In Ephesians 6:10 he says, “Finally be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” Finally, be strong in the Lord and his mighty power.

That finally word’s important there because it tells me that what we’re about to get from Paul is a heartbeat message because the last thing that you want to say is usually it’s about a heart. You might do some technical stuff before the last things but that last thing, that’s a heart thing. When Coletta and I leave, when we say goodbye to the girls I mean there are some details we talk about. Make sure you don’t forget this, make sure you do this, but most important thing is we love you. That’s the heart message.

Rochelle, she’s been there for a couple of year now, but I’m still getting used to the fact that she drives herself places and I still freak out about that a little bit. She and Lynae went up to ski, the other day, by themselves and there’s a part of me that it’s like, “Wait, that’s not right. There’s something wrong here.” But when they left, what we said to them was don’t forget this, make sure you do this but the last thing we said of course was be careful. Be careful. It’s the heart thing.

Paul says here’s my last thing, here’s my heartbeat thing. “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” What he says is push into your relationship with God because it’s in your relationship with God, it’s in the strength of your relationship with God that you’re going to find access to his mighty power. He doesn’t say you’ve just got to be strong, he says, no, be strong in your relationship and you’ll have access to his mighty power. The reason that he wants to say that, the reason that’s on his heart is because he understands that we’re living in a world in which we are at war.
And so he says, “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you’ve done everything, to stand.” Really, what Paul says here is you got to put on the full armor of God because we’re facing a powerful enemy. He says, “Be strong in the Lord and have access to his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God because you’re facing a powerful enemy.”

Now, he uses a number of words to talk about this enemy. He says that there are rulers, authorities and we might be inclined to think he’s talking about government officials but he’s not. When you see the list, you see he’s got something very different, rulers, authorities, powers of this dark world, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Every single one of these words that Paul uses here is a word that the Ephesians used to refer to demonic spirits. He’s talking about demons. Now you need to understand that when the Bible talks about demons, when the Bible talks about demonic forces, it’s not using a metaphor. It’s speaking about actual creatures. The Bible doesn’t tell us a lot about them and I think that’s because we’re not supposed to be fixated on them, we’re supposed to be fixated on Jesus but when we put the few things that the Bible says together, we get kind of broad picture of these things that he’s talking about.

At some point, God created a group of creatures that we call angels. In a lot of ways they’re like us. They’re rational, they have the ability to think, they use language, they send out emotions, but there’s one very important way in which they’re different than us. One thing we have that they don’t, we’re flesh and blood, they’re not. They’re spirits. They’re creatures entirely of spirit. Some of those angels led by one of those angels that we refer to as Satan or the devil, some of those angels rebelled against God and they became what we call demonic spirits or demons. These are real things and I know that’s not the kind of language that we use in the world. It almost feels kind of superstitious and primitive to talk about demons, but the reality is that the Bible assumes that these are real things. They’re not metaphors, they’re actual creatures. They are out there and they exert a powerful influence on the world.

I say that demons are real not just because the word of God says it, which is enough for me, but because I’ve had enough experience. I’ve had some situations that I cannot explain apart from the existence of these actual things. I don’t usually tell sensational stories because that takes the focus off of Jesus but I’ve had some sensational experiences that prove to me the word of God is talking truth when it says these creatures are out there. What Paul says is, these are our enemy. It’s not flesh and blood. This is our enemy. These creatures, which exert this powerful influence in the world, this is our enemy. Don’t lose sight of it, he says. It’s easy for us to lose sight of it. It’s easy for us to focus on flesh and blood, and what Paul says is, that’s not your enemy.

It’s a little bit like this. I was a youth pastor for many years which means that I spent a lot of time playing dodgeball. I don’t know if you know it but that’s a requirement for youth ministry. It’s core truth. The Bible’s the inherent word of God, we receive the gospel by faith in Jesus and though shalt play a lot of dodgeball if you’re a youth pastor. It’s just the way it is. I was not a baseball player, so my arm is not that great but I figured out really early on I could take out the best potential dodgeball players real early on. Here’s how I did it. I would get two balls, one in my right hand that was ready to go and then one in my left hand. I’m not a left hander so I didn’t have to be accurate and I didn’t need to be accurate. All I would do is I would lob it up in the general direction of the best players in the opposite team. Inevitably, they would go and then I’d nail them while they were doing that. Get rid of those guys early in the process because here’s the thing, we have a really hard time focusing on the real threat. They’re watching that and the real threat’s coming from a different direction.

Really, what Paul was saying is that your struggle, your real enemy is not flesh and blood. It’s not non-believers which is where we tend to go. It’s the government officials, it’s these people that give us a hard time. It’s the ACLU. It’s this party and the government or that group. No, no, no, he says. Our flesh, that’s not our enemy. Flesh and blood is not our enemy. Our enemy is not non-Christians. Listen to me. The church’s enemy is not non-believers. The church’s enemy is the spiritual forces to which
non-believers are enslaved. Non-believers are often like balls that have been lobed at us and we’re focused on them while the enemy is doing his real work somewhere else. Now, why do I say they are enslaved? Because that’s what Paul says.

As a quick review, drop back with me to Ephesians, Chapter 2. In Ephesians, Chapter 2, Paul says this, “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when,” this is the important part, “when you followed the ways of this world.” Why is this world characterized beset in transgressions? Because he says, “It is under the influence of the ruler of the kingdom of the air.” That’s a euphemism for Satan in Ephesus. The spirit who is now actively at work in those who are disobedient, and that is non-believers. He says, “All of us have lived among them at one time.” What Paul is saying is that it is the spiritual forces of evil that exert this influence on the world that we need to be focused on. The reality is that our sin puts us under that control. Adam and Eve’s sin brought us under their control. Our individual sin gives them handles and footholds in our lives and they exert this influence.

Now understand, I’m not talking demon possession. I’m not talking anything spectacular like that. I’m talking imprisonment. I’m talking about a way of living where we are controlled, we’re constrained and we’re confused into believing that we’re free when nothing could be further from the truth. Paul says, “Stop fighting against prisoners because your war’s with their prison keepers.” These were the prison keepers that we were once under, but the gospel and our embrace by faith of what Jesus did for us has set us free.

Here’s the thing, we might be out of their hands but we’re not off their radar. We might be out of their control, but we are not off of their radar. The devil consistently works. The devil and his forces consistently work attempting to undermine the work that God has done in us. They attempt to consistently get us to lose track of our identity in Christ, who we are and the truth that God speaks over us as his children. God speaks this truth over us. He says, “You’re adopted but if you have received the gospel of Jesus Christ, if you have received forgiveness and freedom by faith, you are adopted as my beloved child. That is who you are, that is your identity.” And Satan goes, “No, no, no, at best, at best, you are tolerated servant and your place in the household of God is hanging by a thread. You mess up one too many times or you mess in one way too bad and you’re out on the streets, you’re out of the family.” And God says, “No, that’s not the truth I speak. You’re my adopted, beloved child.”

Satan constantly works to cause us to lose sight of that reality. God speaks this truth over us. He says that if you are in Christ, you have been seated in the heavenly realms, which as we talked about a few weeks ago that’s in Ephesians 2, that means that we’re in a position of authority over evil forces. Those same spirits that once dragged us around whether we knew it or not, we now have authority over them and Satan works to get us to cower in fear of our former wardens. God speaks this truth over you, he says, “You have experienced reconciliation. If you are in Christ, you’ve been reconciled not only with God but with one another.”

The barriers of division between God and you, they’ve been demolished by the blood of Christ. The walls of hostility between you and others, they have been torn down in the flesh and the sacrifice of Jesus. And the devil works really hard to rebuild what God has destroyed, to rebuild divisions and separations. He works really hard to get us to get us to undo it, to steal our identity. And so Paul says, “You got to be ready, you got to be ready.” He says, “Put on the full armor of God.” Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.

If you got a physical Bible or you have ability to underline something in whatever way you’re reading God’s word here, underline the word “schemes.” It’s an interesting term. The Greek word that’s underneath it basically means deceptive techniques. Deceptive techniques. It’s interesting to me that God doesn’t say that we need to withstand the devil’s attacks. He says that we need to withstand the devil’s deceptions. We don’t really have to worry about brute force attacks, but that’s not what’s coming against us. We don’t have to worry about brute force attacks because they’re nothing more than the puff of air, not when we’re in Christ.

When Jesus came on the scene, one of the things that immediately attracted people’s attention was when he had brute force attacks when demonic spirits possessing people in a variety of ways came against him directly, he just said, “Get out.” It’s like
the worst exorcism ever. “Just go,” and people went, “There’s no way that’s going to...” That worked. “How did you do that?” They said, “What is this of new teaching and with authority? Even evil spirits they obey him.” But it wasn’t just Jesus.

You got to understand that you read the gospels and you see that his followers were delegated that same authority and they came back to Jesus and said, “It was the craziest thing. You remember that one time that you said, “Get out” and we’re like that’s not going to work and it did. That was really cool. I was doing the same thing and they came and we said, “Get out” and they did.” Jesus, what he said to them was, “Yeah, but you know what, rejoice that your name is written in the book of life. Rejoice that you’re in the family because that whole power over those evil spirits, that’s minor. It’s tangential.” That’s not how they were thinking about it, but that was the fullness of the freedom that they had in Christ.

The devil understands he doesn’t have that kind of power, so he rarely comes at us in full force but he often comes at us with identity theft, with an attempt to undermine our grasp on the reality of who we are in Christ. So he says, “You’ve got to put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.” Okay, what’s this day of evil? There’s two ways to think about it. It could be like some end times thing, some future day at the apocalypse or whatever, but I don’t think that’s terribly likely because he uses a very similar phrase in 5:16. In 5:16, in Ephesians, he says, “Make the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

What he’s saying is this is the world that we live in. You’re not imprisoned anymore, but you’re still kind of walking around in the prison yard. They don’t have any authority over you, but this is the state of the world that we live in. And when he talks here in Chapter 6 about the day of evil, I think what he probably has in mind is those particular days when the deceptive attacks of the enemy come against us in greater force. They’re going to be days like that, but you don’t know when they’re coming, so he says you got to be ready, you got to be prepared.

If you got up tomorrow morning and you opened up the weather channel app and it said, “Today it’ll be a high of 47 and it will be a day of evil.” Man, I’m going back to bed, right? You wouldn’t go out of the house without being prepared and what Paul is saying is you don’t know when those days are going to be. You don’t know when it’s going to be more intense than the other days. You don’t know when the attacks are going to come against you in greater fury and strength, so you got to be ready every day. You got to put on the full armor of God.

And so he begins to unpack what that looks like. He says, “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, and with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Now, let me say three big picture observations that will help us to not only understand what Paul is saying but what it looks like to do it practically. The first observation is this. It’s an odd thing. Paul says, “Put on the full armor of God,” but he does not describe the full armor. He says put on the full armor, but he does not describe all of the pieces that would have been typical of Roman armor. Typical Roman armor involved a number of things that you would never go out to battle without and he says nothing about them. A Roman would never go out to battle without these things called manicas that protected the forearms. They would never go to battle without the greaves around their legs.

It’s interesting Paul says put on the full armor, but he does not describe all the pieces of the full armor. Why? Because what Paul is doing is he’s probably illustrating the principle of preparedness, not giving an exhaustive list of all the pieces. You hear me? The main thing that we’re supposed to understand is that he’s saying, be ready. You don’t know when these attacks are coming so you got to be ready with the full armor, but he’s not trying to give us all the details of each individual piece because he’s mainly saying you got to be ready.

Second thing to note, it’s really significant, is that a lot of the language that Paul was using here is borrowed from Isaiah, Chap-
It's a tremendous amount of language. In Isaiah 52 we find statements like, “Put on these garments.” We find statements like, “Blessed are the feet that bear good news gospel.” He talks about peace. He talks about salvation. All of that language is found in Isaiah 52. Here's why that's important. Because the big idea in Isaiah 52 is that God fights for his people. God fights for his people. We're encouraged in Isaiah 52, to take courage from the fact that we have a God who will fight on our behalf. We don't have to win the battles, we don't have to win the wars, we just have to be safe behind the God who will fight on our behalf.

Really, what Paul is saying here is this armor of God that we're called to protect ourselves with it ultimately boils down to a relationship with the God who will fight for us. It's a key idea. The armor of God that we're called to protect ourselves with is ultimately a relationship with God who will fight for us and that goes right back to the beginning, to that final thought, right? Be strong, where? In the Lord and that relationship with him and then you'll have access to his mighty power and he will fight on your behalf.

The third thing I want to make sure we understand before we get into the specifics of this armor is this, that this description of the armor begins with pivots around and then ends with references to the gospel message. It begins with pivots around and ends with references to the gospel message. Why do I say that? Because there are three pieces of armor that are closely associated with words that are synonyms for the gospel within the book of Ephesians. Let me explain what I mean. He begins obviously with the statement about the belt of truth, but that word truth has been used in Ephesians as a synonym for the gospel message. If you flip back to 1:13, he says this. He says, “And you also were included in Christ, you were saved when you heard the message of truth which is the gospel of your salvation.” You see what I'm saying. He's using the word truth as a synonym for the gospel message.

In the middle of this description of the armor, he talks about our feet that are made ready with the gospel of peace. He actually uses the word gospel there. It's attached to this feet business. At the end of this description of the armor he says, “Take up the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.” Now, when we hear the phrase word of God, what do we naturally think of? We think of the Bible, right? That's right but it's not entirely right. Here's what I mean. This idea of the word of God is carried throughout scripture from the very first few pages of scripture to the very last few pages of scripture. This idea of the word of God is quite common. Typically, the word of God means the authoritative declaration of God. It's an important understanding.

In the Old Testament, when a prophet received the word of the Lord, it was an authoritative declaration. Now, the Bible is part of that. The Bible is a record and it is real revelation of authoritative words of God. This is the authoritative word of God, so it is part of the word of God, but the word of God is a larger concept than that. It is always used to refer to an authoritative declaration of God. In the book of Ephesians, Paul uses the concept of the word as a synonym for the gospel.

If you flip back to 5:26. In 5:26, Paul is talking about what Christ did in order to save the church. He says this, “He loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.” Now, what could we think of? What do we do inside the Christian church that symbolizes salvation that involves water? It's baptism. He's not going to wash him through the water...He's saying yeah, we're talking about baptism. What makes baptism possible? What is baptism the result of? It's a result of something to do with what? The word. Why do we get baptized? Because we have received what? The gospel. He's using the word, word as synonymous with the gospel because the gospel is the authoritative declaration of God. He's saying this is how it's done. This is how you shall be saved. You shall trust in what God did by sending his son who died on the cross to take your sins and then rose again. And he says this is it. This is how it's done. This is the authoritative declaration.

And so you understand when we put this together. When Paul begins to describe the armor, he begins with a piece of armor closely associated with the gospel message. In the middle of it, he refers to the gospel message and at the end of it he comes back again to the gospel message. In other words, to put on the full armor of God is to cling to the gospel and all of its implications. To put on the full armor of God is to cling to the gospel and all of its implications.
This is good news by the way because it means that to put on the full armor of God doesn’t mean you got to get up every morning, you got to juggle a bunch of pieces. No, no, no, he says. Be ready. Put on the full armor of God by clinging to the gospel itself and all of its implications. He says buckle the belt of truth around your waist. The belt of truth is the gospel message. Buckle around. He says, “This is how you are saved.” You were saved by a God who loves you enough to sacrifice himself and so you were saved by a God who loves you enough to fight for you. Buckle that around you because that holds everything together. Don’t lose sight of that or you’re going to be in sorry shape.

He says, “Put the breastplate of righteousness in place.” The breastplate of righteousness, that’s a fascinating statement, but here’s the thing. What the devil tries to tell you is, it is your righteousness that will get you into God’s good graces. You’ve got to be good enough. You’ve got to balance the scales. You’ve got to convince him to love you by your behavior, by your righteousness and that’s not the gospel. The gospel says, your righteousness is the worst, but his is the best. Yeah, you got to be righteous to get into God’s presence, but you’re never going to get there on your own so here’s the deal, Jesus’s righteousness will be your breastplate. Notice the breastplate is external. It’s put on you. It doesn’t come out from you.

He says, “Protect yourself with the breastplate of righteousness,” because his righteousness is perfect. It cannot be penetrated. If we were dependent upon our righteousness, there’s all kinds of chinks in that armor. But he says, “Guard yourself up.” Protect yourself with his righteousness. It’s outside of you, but it’s put upon you. He says, “Your feet should be fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.” It’s interesting. There he actually doesn’t even mention the piece of armor. He just says your feet need to be ready with the gospel of peace. What does he mean by ready? The answer is ready to stand, ready to resist this identity theft when the devil comes in and says, “God doesn’t love you. You’ve done wrong. Yeah, yeah, yeah, maybe, maybe he did love you. Maybe he saved you by grace but now that you’ve received his grace, you’re stomping all over it, you’re doing all these wrong things. Let’s just get in there and let’s make a little bit of a division. You need to back off.”

And we go, “No, I ain’t moving. You’re going to try to separate me from my God. No, I’m not moving. My feet are ready to withstand that push. I’m planted. You want to try to separate me from my brother in Christ because we have a difference of opinion about something, because we like different kinds of worship music, because we think that this is the way to do it or that. No, no, no, I ain’t moving. I’m planted, you can’t push me apart. You can’t separate me. You want to separate me from my wife. No, no, no, my feet are ready. Your boots might be made for walking, but these feet ain’t made for moving.” That was really cheesy. I’m sorry. But he says, “Your feet are fitted. They’re ready with the gospel of peace because God declares this truth.” That if you have faith in Jesus, he says you and I have peace. We’re good. It’s not your righteousness, but we’re good. There’s nothing that needs to separate us. In fact there is nothing that can separate us.

Rest strong, stand firm in that peace. When it seems like there is division coming among believers we go, “No, God died, Jesus died to give us peace with one another. To overcome these barriers of hostility in his own flesh.” It’s what we talked about a few months ago. We have peace with one another and we’re going to live that way in spite of what the devil tries to do. The gospel brings peace.

He says, “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.” Do you see the gospel centrality in all this? How do you take hold of the gospel? By faith. He says take up the shield because the enemy is going to keep coming against you, so lift it up and go, “I was saved by faith.” When the devil says, “You’re not good enough,” we go, “Yeah, I know. Don’t have to be, Jesus is plenty good enough.” Then the devil says, “You are a disappointment to your father.” You, “Yeah, I know but he loves me anyway. He doesn’t seem to even care about all the ways I disappoint him. He keeps coming after me and lifting me up and telling me how much he loves me.” Faith.

Now, the problem is the arrows are scary. They’re flaming arrows. The shield of faith is more than enough to block them to keep them from penetrating, but because they’re on fire, the temptation is to drop the shield and run. I got to tell you something, if you turn your back and run, you’re not going to get away. He’s just going to shoot you in the back and so we keep hold of that shield. We go, “I’m saved by faith. In what Jesus did for me, do your best I’m not scared of you.”
When he realizes we’re not going to run, he comes in close and so he poses, “Take up the helmet of salvation.” The helmet of salvation. Protect your most important assets with the knowledge that your salvation was secured by the blood of Jesus, not by your effort. Your salvation, your place in the family of God was made permanent by your trust in the gospel message. Put that on your head. Guard your most important assets with the knowledge that God achieved your salvation, you didn’t earn it.

When the devil begins to strike blows, he says, “Take up the sword of the Spirit.” This is the weapon which comes from the Holy Spirit reminding us this is what you fight back with and it is the word of God, it is the gospel message again. The devil comes in and says, “You’re not good enough,” we go, “Gospel.” He says, “You’ve screwed up one too many times.” “Gospel.” He says, “You’re a loser.” “Gospel.” Whatever those attacks are we go, “The good news of Jesus Christ says none of that matters because I’m loved, because I am accepted, because I am adopted and I am a child of God and I have authority so do your best, it ain’t going to be good enough.”

If you understand that what Paul is saying here is that the gospel is our salvation and our security. It is our salvation and our security. So he says, “Because of this,” because it’s your salvation and your security, verse 18, “Pray in the Spirit in all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all of the Lord’s people.” He says because you’re in the family of God, by the gospel, don’t hesitate to go to your father with whatever you need, whatever you need. Do you need personal provision? Ask. Do you need provision for your church? Ask. Do you need to see a stronghold of the enemy destroyed out in the world? Ask. Ask all of it. Why would you hesitate to go to a God who loves you this much?

He says, “Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given to me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should. Tychicus, the dear brother and faithful servant in the Lord, he’ll tell you everything, so that you may also know how I am and what I’m doing. I’m sending him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage you. Peace to the brothers and the sisters, and love with faith from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.”

Paul’s final words, his heartbeat words, is understand this, the gospel is your salvation and your security, cling to it with everything you have. In that way, you will be ready to face the identity theft attempts that are constantly coming against you. But when you lose sight of the gospel, your identity can be stolen without much effort. And so I ask you two questions. Number one, is your place in the family of God secured by the gospel? This is not a general question. This is a very personal individual question. Is your place in the family of God secured by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.

The reality is that you can spend a lot of time in church, you can hear the gospel message over and over and yet still somehow think that to get into God’s good graces you’ve got to work your way there. You may be here and you’re under the illusion that you’re in the family of God because you’re a good person. I got bad news for you. You are not a good person. You’re not good enough. You’ll never be good enough. The good news is you don’t have to be good enough. Jesus is good enough and his righteousness is available to you, his forgiveness is available to you. We can spend a lot of time in church and not understand that. We think my place depends upon my goodness, my place depends upon the fact that I’ve been in church my whole life, that I’m involved in these things and that things. Listen, it’s not.

Your place in the family of God cannot be secured by those things. It can only be secured by the gospel of Jesus Christ. All you have to do is to take hold of it by faith. You say, “I’ve done wrong. I’m not good enough.” You say, “I’m sorry. Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross for me. Jesus, thank you for rising from the death to prove that you have this new life. Jesus, come into my life and set me free.” With those five things, we grab hold of the gospel message and our place in the family of God is secured for all of eternity.

If you’re here today and you cannot say with confidence that your place in the family of God is secured by the gospel, would you
change that right now? Everybody just close your eyes, bow your heads. If you’re here today and you can’t say that your place is secured by the gospel and the gospel only, would you just say to Jesus right now, “Jesus, I’ve done wrong. I’m sorry. Thank you for dying in my place. Thank you for rising from the dead. Come into my life and set me free. Amen.” If you’re here today and you prayed that for the first time, you need to understand that at this moment your place in the family of God is secured by the gospel and the gospel alone, but it’s not just our salvation, it’s also our security.

I think the rest of us who maybe have made that decision sometime in the past, we need to wrestle with the question, “Am I staying centered in the pure gospel of Jesus Christ?” The danger is that we can come to Christ by faith in the gospel and then begin to think that somehow we got to keep our way in God’s good graces, we have to keep ourselves in God’s favor by our behavior and it’s a lie. It’s an identity theft technique. The question that I want you to wrestle with is am I staying centered in the pure gospel of Jesus Christ? Is it both my salvation and my security? When the devil comes against me, can I respond, “You got nothing on me because of the gospel.” It’s easy to lose track of it.

Coletta and I got married 23 years ago which means I won. I got her. I had to fight the fight, I had to earn her favor. It doesn’t work like that with God. All analogies break down but the point is this, I won. I earned her favor. I convinced her to say yes. She said yes, we got married which means that my behavior cannot make my marriage. The way I respond to her cannot make us married or not married. We’re married, it’s a done deal. The way I treat her flows from my relationship with her. It does not lead to it. Do you understand the difference? Now when I get up, I think what a gift, what a treasure God has given me. I want to treat her accordingly. I want my life to reflect the reality of this relationship I have. I don’t earn marriage by my behavior, I behave as a response to our marriage. In the same way, God says, “Stop trying to earn my favor. It’s never going to work and you don’t need to because you already have it. I love you, I love you, I love you.”

The gospel makes all that possible. We need to make sure that we remember that the gospel is not only our salvation, it is always and must always be our security and in this way we will be armored by the full armor of God able to withstand all of the devil’s deceptions.

Would you pray with me? Jesus, we thank you for the essence of the gospel. This incredibly simple message that we were not good enough, but you who were perfect died in our place. You took our sins upon yourself, you went to the cross and you went to the grave and three days later you rose from the dead proving that you had achieved freedom from sin, from death and ultimately from the captivity that we all faced enslaved to dark forces, and that simply by faith we take hold of that and we are free. Jesus, thank you that the gospel is our salvation and Lord, I’m convinced that there are some people in this room that asked you for the first time to save them, to set them free by the gospel and the gospel alone and we rejoice in their salvation and we confess that we often lose sight of it. We lose track of the simplicity of the gospel and we make it so much more and ultimately we end up making it about ourselves. Lord, remind us that the gospel is also our security. Show us those places that we were wrestling trying to earn favor by behavior rather than allowing behavior to flow from the favor that you have placed upon us. Lord clothe us in your armor. Fight for us as we cling to the gospel as our salvation and our security. In Jesus name, amen.