

[BLANK][PRAYER] It is a joy to see you, and a joy to celebrate our faith today here in this beautiful place, filled with the promises of a saving faith. I hope that you all have enjoyed my sermon series this summer on firing up a saving faith, a journey through the letter to the Ephesians, an early church of Christians, who were in the second generation of people who followed Jesus. There are still some study guides available in the back of the church if you'd like to study this powerful letter some more.

[RICH] We started out six weeks ago by seeing how these Ephesians were discovering the riches that a saving faith in Jesus Christ were giving them. There is a huge payoff to having faith in Jesus as our savior, and they knew it! [WIDE] We then looked at how wide a saving faith could be. For the first time, early Christians were not just talking about how anyone from any culture or tradition could be touched by God through a saving faith - they were doing it! The church was not just meant for a few people, it was meant for the world. [DEEP] And a church meant for anyone meant that we needed a deep saving faith, one that could help us to find peace and forgiveness with even our worst enemies, and the ones who have hurt us the most.

[STRONG] How strong do we need to be to have a faith like this? The letter to the Ephesians makes it clear that a saving faith asks us to be as strong as humble Jesus - to be willing to rely on God's strength, and not the world's strength, to find out sense of peace and power in life. Jesus Christ is God's promise to the world that God's strength will always win over human strength for our salvation - no matter what. [LOVING] The good news in this letter to the Ephesians is that all of this helps us to be more loving, even when we face the things in ourselves, in others, and in the world that we have a hard time loving. We can find in a saving faith the power to speak the truth with love, and to take courageous steps forward in our lives, steps that will give us and God's world new hope. [JOYFUL] And through this love, born from a saving faith, we can begin to touch the joy in life that we all long to have in abundance. The darkest of days can be filled with the light of faith, and music of hope can lead us to the next part of God's story, in our own lives, and in the life to come. [BLANK]

These are the powerful tools of faith that changed the world. We might take the idea of being Christians for granted. It's so much a part of the culture and the history that we have grown up in. But we cannot take a saving faith for granted. A saving faith is something that's promised to us when we are baptised, but it's up to us to live lives that bring the saving power of Jesus into God's world. Each person who does that in the name of Jesus Christ, in the power of God's Holy Spirit, becomes a part of Christ, a part of God's living presence on earth.

We know this, in our hearts, probably. And yet. And yet. We hedge our bets. We prefer to think of the battle for salvation to be already done, or best left for others to fight. We want to just go and get what we want, how we want it, where we want it, use those things to give us our sense of safety, and give God a nod every now and then. Or we might pick up a few tools of faith, be content with the results, and check faith off of our to-do list.

Well, God gives us the freedom to do just that. God doesn't want robots of faith: God wants people with hearts set on God, the way that God's heart is set on us. God gives us the freedom to be only partially prepared for a life that needs a saving faith. God allows us to look for safety in things that deceive us, and that make us trust in power and strength that comes from us, and not from the mind and heart of God. God knew this was how it would be, even before God made Creation. And so, from before the beginning of Creation, God's promise of salvation in Jesus Christ already existed, to give us the faith to choose the One who will save us from our choices.

We don't think about this generally - until we have to. [MEMORIAL] I took a few vacation days this week, and so on Tuesday I went down to the National September 11th Memorial in New York City, to pray with my many friends and colleagues who died there, nearly seventeen years ago. [TALL BEAM] For the first time, I visited the museum that is built underneath the memorial park. [BENT BEAM] The museum reminds me so powerfully of how the things of our own making, the things of our own imagining, are so very weak and fragile, [BEAM2] in comparison to God's power and imagination, forged in everlasting love.

[WORLD TRADE CENTER] The buildings that I worked in and visited so many times, filled with powerful financial companies, powerful government agencies, buildings, and institutions that were supposed to be safe - they became just twisted rubble, in a matter of seconds. The fortunes that people worked so hard to collect, they have come and gone, many times over. What we trust in, what we strive for, to be saved from what we fear, becomes the story of our lives, one way or another. If we do not focus completely on the strength that God has offered us in a saving faith, we will be vulnerable when we need God's strength the most, no matter how hard we try. [BLANK]

This is why the letter to the Ephesians closes with one of the most powerful images of faith - the armor of God. [ARMOR] Armor is costly. Armor is heavy. It takes energy to pick it up, and to put it on. And armor is not perfect. There is always a way for something to hurt us where we are weak. But if we are to be ready for the battle that Christian faith calls us to be a part of, we need to be ready for that battle completely, and not let ourselves and others down when we need God's safety the most. The army of Christ is not like human armies. Our armor offers God's safety for the battle in God's ways, not our ways. And we need it all to find and to keep our saving faith.

And so, my family in Christ, I invite you, as Ephesians invites us, to pick up the FULL armor of God, because it is the true way to be safe in God's world, and to fight the battle of faith that we are meant to fight in a world that needs a saving faith so very much. Pick up the helmet that is the hope of salvation. What we hope for is what moves us forward. It sets our mind free from fear of defeat by this the powers of this world. Set your mind on the hope of Christ, and Christ alone.

Pick up the breastplate of righteousness. A breastplate protects our heart. Our hearts must always be seeking God's safety, not the world's safety. Righteousness is a word that reminds us that our hearts must be set on what God knows is right - to love God, and

one another, as God wants us to love ourselves. If we seek our own sense of right, or own justice apart from God, our heart can lead us to false passions, hurt, and danger.

Pick up the belt of truth. Now, my costume is incomplete, here, but hopefully you get the idea. In the time of Jesus, your belt was not a fashion accessory. If you lost your belt, guess what - you'd be naked underneath it all! Your head may be in the right place, and your heart might be in the right place, but if you're not accepting the truth in the light of God's love, then your faith will look foolish. Constantly seek out God's truth as your safety. Don't clothe yourself in empty lies.

Pick up the shoes of peace. Countless people have died, or been hurt, in the name of Christian faith, because people thought human power was God's power. When our hearts are at war, then God cannot win the battle for our hearts and souls. When our hearts are at peace, safe in God's loving protection, then where we walk in faith will lead us to places of peace, not places of war.

Pick up the shield of faith. When the enemies of a saving faith are pushing in hard on us, faith is our extra armor where we need it the most. We must trust and use our faith as that extra source of God's strength, again and again, no matter how much we are challenged. It takes spiritual strength to do this. But God, and God's family of faith, are here to help you to find that strength.

And, finally, pick up the sword of spirit. It is time to go on the offense, and to pierce the hearts of others with God's Holy Spirit. Our will cannot defeat the enemies of faith in other people's hearts. It is God's pure Spirit working in us, together, that conquers hearts for God's saving faith, offered to us by God in Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of Humanity, savior of all of Creation! Know that your redeemer lives in your heart, share that faith with the world in God's Holy Spirit, and watch what happens!

My family in Christ, how safe is a saving faith? Pick up the full armor of God, and find out! Fire up your saving faith, together, so that God's love may conquer the world! Onward, Christian soldiers, not into our wars, but the war for the love of God, conquering every heart in God's world, now, and forever. To God be the glory for offering us God's precious gift of a saving faith! Amen!