

## **My Nicest Shoes**

**Ephesians 6:15**

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*January 20, 2013 – Evening Sermon*

The text for this study is one verse found in Ephesians 6:15. The context here is the Spiritual armor that the Apostle Paul is advising us to embrace and apply to our lives. We are going to look at one of those pieces of armor. I will actually read the verse before it but I'll focus on verse 15. Ephesians 6:14-15 says *[14] Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, [15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.* Here ends the reading of God's Word. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, we thank You so much for the terrific privilege of having you speak personally to us in these words of Scripture. Lord, we're so aware that we live in an increasingly hostile environment and we have to constantly be vigilant of ourselves as to the right, proper, Biblical response to those around us, to issues around us, to those things to which in many ways threaten our spiritual existence and threaten the life of Your church. I pray that You might give us wisdom as we rejoice in how well that You have equipped us for the task that You have given us. Father we thank You for Your grace and mercy and we pray that You might use this time for Your glory, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

The story goes that three building contractors at one time were visiting the White House in Washington DC. They took the tour and the after the tour the guide stood there talking to them and realizing that they were all building contractors. One was from Missouri, one was from Florida and one was from New York. As he talked with them he said "We have a job out behind the White House. We have a fence there that is in bad need of repair, would you all be interested in offering a bid?" All three of them said "Sure, we'd love to" so he guided them out to behind the White House. They were all looking at this fence that needed repaired and the contractor from Florida after measuring and doing calculations said "I can do the job for \$900. That would be \$400 for material, \$400 for my crew and \$100 profit for me." After doing his measuring and calculating the contractor from Missouri said "I can do the job for \$700. That would be \$300 for materials, \$300 for my crew and \$100 profit for me." The building contractor from New York just without thinking said "It will cost you \$2700." The guide scratched

his head and said "Where did you come up with that number?" He said "It would be \$1,000 for me, \$1,000 for you and then we'll hire that guy from Missouri." I love that story with all due respect for building contractors because that third guy knew exactly what he wanted and he knew how to get it and he knew how to get the resources to accomplish great profit for himself and the guy at the White House.

However, when it comes to Spiritual warfare, you and I know that we can't wheel and deal our way into a victory. In fact, we don't have the resources. As human beings we're way out of our league when it comes to the Spiritual warfare around us and the Apostle Paul knew that in this chapter. He outlines very carefully what is needed by followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, if they were going to endure the spiritual conflict that they had then in the first century and what we have to this day. He says to pick up the whole armor of God and then he speaks of the breastplate of righteousness. It's that truth that doctrine which equips us, enables us and energizes us in the midst of spiritual conflict. Then he turns to the breast plate of righteousness which is that personal righteousness that comes in a sense with the cooperation of God's Spirit and our discipline. It's that personal righteousness that assures me, defends me and prepares me for the fight.

Then he turns to the third item that is really needed when we're struggling in the world especially in terms of this world where the economic decay distresses us, the political issues and the way they're handled distress us, the whole spiritual climate of this world is distressing to us. This third item is what you and I really need when facing the difficulties that bring us such angst in society around us. When Herbert Hoover was elected president of the United States in 1928 he was wildly popular but less than seven months after he was inaugurated, most of you know that the Great Depression hit. As the saying goes he went from the penthouse to the outhouse. He was largely blamed in popular culture for the Depression and his popularity bottomed out. Hostility grew. Criticism grew and it characterized in many ways the rest of his presidency. Once after he had been president a reporter asked him, "Mr. President how do you handle the criticism? Do you ever get agitated or tense?" Hoover replied interestingly, "No, not at all. Of course not."

The reporter was impressed so he pressed the issue "When I was a boy you were one of the most popular men in the world and then there was a time when you became the most vilified, unpopular president in many years. Nearly everyone was against you and didn't any of this meanness and criticism ever get under your skin?" Herbert Hoover responded "No, when I went into politics I knew what I might expect and when it came I wasn't disappointed or upset." Then he lowered his eyes with his big bushy eyebrows sticking out and said "Besides, I have peace at the center, you know." That is a very famous Herbert Hoover quote - "Besides, I have peace at the center, you know." I don't know where he was coming from spiritually because he was actually a practicing Quaker but he makes a very interesting point that in the midst of trials and

tribulation our peace doesn't come from our circumstances or our surroundings. Our peace comes from what is inside. That's a very Biblical truth.

The profound point is that difficulty, criticism, disappointment and opposition don't make us the way we are. They in a sense reveal the way they are. They show, they demonstrate how much the Gospel of peace is really working in our lives, in our hearts. Therefore Paul stresses his third piece of armor which is in Ephesians 6:15 which says *[15] and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace.* The Gospel of peace is quite profound. In a hostile, intimidating and disappointing world, the Gospel of peace is absolutely essential for you and me and the question I have for myself is, 'is it flourishing?' Can people see it in my life? As things seem to spin out of control in our culture, is my agitation increasing? Is my disdain, criticism, and cynicism increasing or is the Gospel of peace reigning? It's a good question. Are our heels or our feet shorn with the Gospel of peace?

Having the right shoes has always been pretty hard for me. I have pretty small feet. I'm a twin and my twin brother is 6 foot 2 and has blue eyes and blond hair. I have dark hair and a lot shorter than him. I remember once in High School we were both running track. My brother was an all American and far more proficient than me but I remember taking my running shoes once and putting them on my feet and then putting his shoes on top of mine. That was the difference in our foot size. I wore just a little over a 6 and he could wear almost a 12. One day I literally put on his shoes over mine and wore them around the locker room just to see what it would feel like and they actually fit pretty well.

I've always had a problem with my shoes. My feet are small, short and kind of square. Buying the right shoes is always difficult for me. They aren't all the selections and options that everyone else has. When I finally find shoes that I like I look for those that are appropriate. Do they fit the job? Are they running shoes, dress shoes, or casual shoes etc? They have to be appropriate and right for the job. Secondly, are they durable? I especially want this in an athletic shoe. I want them working well for a while. Thirdly, are they light and flexible? Do the shoes hamper me? Are they appropriate? Can I jog without feeling weighted down?

When Paul was writing this passage he had something very specific in mind. He was thinking of those infantry soldiers. Now they didn't have shoes nearly as elaborate as ours but they did have these sandals that were carefully studded with nails. These nails enabled them to grip the ground very well. These Roman soldiers were experts at moving quickly. In the armies of the day of the Apostle Paul, under Julius Caesar, the Romans had an incredible reputation for being able to move legions of soldiers at very fast speeds, often much faster than the enemies of Rome would ever imagine. Therefore they often won victories simply because their shoes were so appropriate and durable. They were so light and flexible that they could ambush enemies before the enemy knew that they were

there. Alexander the Great recognized this later of having soldiers in shoes that were proper and well heeled.

Paul knew that as Christians we need our feet fit properly with the Gospel of peace for Spiritual warfare. So you might say "Where do you get these shoes?" You go to the Gospel of peace shoe store and only there can Christians find those shoes that are appropriate, that truth of the Gospel that not only saves us but protects us, equips us and gives us confidence in Spiritual warfare. It's very real when you and I because of that Gospel of peace feel equipped, confident and protected. Paul is speaking here of shoes that aren't only appropriate but durable. They stick with us. They protect us our whole life from sin and its power. Because of this Gospel I can endure spiritual attacks throughout my whole life. It's durable.

This Gospel of peace is light and flexible in that the power of the Gospel enables me to flee temptation, Satan's temptation which is all around me and Satan's attempts to defeat me. Those Gospel of peace shoes are light and flexible. They are appropriate and durable so much so that Paul would say about the Gospel in Romans 1:16a, [16] *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes...* So it is essential that you and I embrace this Gospel of peace and understand its implications in our lives.

It's the Gospel that has been paid for by the Lord Jesus Christ, by His perfect life and atoning death. He died as a substitute for us and His bodily resurrection from the grave whereby in Romans 1 it says He was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. By embracing that by faith and turning from my sins I come to Christ and He equips me for the Spiritual battle I'm in.

So often I find that we Christians when it comes to opposition, antagonism or views around us that may not be ours, we handle those a little differently than just folks in the rest of the world. For instance, last week we had our leadership summit here at the church. It was a wonderful Saturday morning of instruction and planning and as part of the program Jeremy led the music and he had us sing the Getty's song, *O Church Arise*. The first line of the second stanza absolutely hit me between the eyes. We were singing along and I guess the Lord just knocked me with this truth because the first line of the second stanza says "Our call to war, to love the captive soul, but to rage against the captor."

What really got me to thinking was how often we reverse that. What an opposite strategy most of us have because what we are tempted to do is to rage against the captive and to love the things of the captor. We rage against those people who actually are held captive by Satan. We despise them, revile them and at times we defame them and then we compromise when it comes to Satan himself. We tend to love the distractions and the comforts that he brings privately in our own lives. We forget that our battle is not against the outspoken politician, the

heretical humanist or the blasphemous entertainer who may trash and deny Biblical truth. They're not the enemy. They just serve the enemy and it's just very sad when they do.

Now certainly we as believers are called to oppose views that are contrary to the Scripture. Certainly we're called to shun the influences of society that are contrary to the Scripture but also you and I need to be truly sad and sorrowful for the captor, those who are under the influence of Satan, whose minds are blinded and whose hearts are dull. It is because Satan has recruited them for service and they are dutifully serving but believe me, he will abandon them on the Day of Judgment. It says in Philippians 2:10-11 says *[10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* These that oppose the truth of Scripture will turn around and find that Satan is not there to hold their hand anymore and comfort them when they are stunned to realize that their opposition has been misplaced, that the Gospel was true and the Scriptures were accurate. It will be a devastating moment when those who do not know Christ stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and see it clearly as it is. Satan will not hold their hand and be with them, but not so with us.

In a hostile world we need to realize that we are dressed with the Gospel of peace. This Gospel is the foundation of my life and it brings a couple of characteristics that are very important. It brings in a sense two kinds of peace. It brings a vertical peace, a peace with God that I could not possibly achieve on my own. That peace with God is purchased by the blood of Christ. It turns our relationship with God of being one of fear to being one of a heavenly Father for whom we can call out and cry "Abba Father!" That vertical peace is astounding. Isaiah wrote about this when he said in Isaiah 53:5, *[5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.* Paul says in Romans 5:1, *[1] Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.* That peace should flood our hearts and souls even in the most difficult times in our society and in our personal lives.

My question is just how much are those shoes of the Gospel of peace manifested in me, not just in the good times but when life isn't so good or when my expectations are not being met or hostility seems to grow? Does that peace continue to flourish in my attitude, in my heart, in the words that I say, in the love I extend to believers and unbelievers, to those I might agree with every day and those I might not? Is that peace equally manifested? It's only because of this vertical peace that peace with the world is ever even possible and that we regard those who have not that peace with great compassion. They are not our enemy and we need to be very careful.

So it's a vertical peace with God but it also results in a horizontal peace with others. These shoes protect us. They give us a firm footing over the tough terrain of tribulation. Because of this horizontal peace we have a peace that under the pressures of life glow with God's peace and rest despite what is going on around us. Jesus said in John 14:27, *[27] Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* Peace is an astonishing thing in a world that is filled with tribulation. What a crucial and essential part of my testimony before a watching world! When everything seems to be going against the way I would like it to go, I walk with peace, with satisfaction and I walk in Christ. Paul says in Philippians 4:6-7, *[6] Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. [7] And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Paul is speaking about that peace that guards our hearts and minds. So, when we're tempted to go running off and be agitated or even angry, it is that peace that guards our hearts.

I've told this story before about my brother-in-law who is a pastor. He had this lady come into his office who had been experiencing panic attacks and he recommended that she have a physical to make sure there was nothing else wrong. As he talked with her over several sessions he came to the conclusion that her problem was that she was watching too much news reports on TV. It was during a time when Americans were being attacked overseas, some had been gruesomely killed and of course all that stuff is paraded in our living rooms over the news reports. She was just soaking it in and soaking it in and her faith was so rattled that she began having these panic attacks. Sure enough when he would check on her and when she started focusing more on the things of God and the Scriptures the attacks went away.

That peace should characterize our life and should be something that is very distinctive. Everyone else is having a hard time and is agitated but you seem to be so comfortable, even when bad things are happening. I'm not saying we minimize the bad things that are happening by any stretch but that we focus on the peace of the Gospel in our lives. When I put on the shoes of the Gospel of peace, God equips me for Spiritual battle and I need to say every morning "Are these shoes on?" I certainly have the Gospel in my heart but am I allowing that peace that benefit from the Gospel to flow freely in my life.

I build up the tread of my shoes when I remind myself of the blessings of the Gospel every day, remembering that this Gospel emphasizes that initiative of God. He reached out to me. He bought me with a price and He will protect His investment in me. I need not worry about the future. I need not worry unduly about my health. I need not worry unduly about the society around me. He has taken the initiative and He'll take care of His investment in me.

It emphasizes the sufficiency of Christ. I heard a quote by Tim Keller that said "Because I wanted to ascend to where He is, He descended to where I am." What a great picture of the sufficiency of Christ. When I wanted to cast aside and become like God, He descended to me to become like man. Christ did what I could not do to make me what I could never be so that I could serve Him in ways that I could never imagine. He has taken the initiative and He is sufficient for that.

Those shoes of the Gospel of peace remind me of the necessity of God's grace and mercy in my own life. Since my relationship is based on what He did I can't lose it. I can always come to Him by faith and seek His forgiveness. I can always come to Him by faith and pray for those difficult circumstances in my life. I can always come to Him and repent of my sin and knowing that He welcomes me back to Himself. That should have a profound influence on my relationship with a hostile world around me because of the confidence of the Gospel of peace in my own life. We should radiate it and the confidence should be very clear.

I'd like to conclude by looking at a passage in the Old Testament in I Samuel 17. The context of this Scripture is the coming out of King David. He wasn't king yet but he was a mere shepherd boy and it came at a time when Israel was being heavily intimidated by the Philistine culture around it. They had, had their weapons taken away. They were confronting the Philistine armies on a daily basis and it was a very difficult time. The armies of God were trembling in the face of these enemies. David realizes what is happening and he watched these soldiers cower before the Philistine armies and he thought he would do something about it. We see this astonishing picture of courage in I Samuel 17. There is a phrase here that to me is astonishing. I Samuel 17:40-47 says

[40] Then he (David) took his staff in his hand and chose five smooth stones from the brook and put them in his shepherd's pouch. His sling was in his hand, and he approached the Philistine. [41] And the Philistine moved forward and came near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. [42] And when the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. [43] And the Philistine said to David, "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. [44] The Philistine said to David, "Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the beasts of the field." [45] Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. [46] This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, [47] and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hand."

This is an astonishing picture of courage and bravery but what follows is what I think is especially fascinating and instructive to me. I Samuel 17:48 says [48] *When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine.* When I last read this is never occurred to me that, that was the way David approached this conflict. I think how seldom do I see the conflict around me, the difficulties, the antagonism and feel heartened that a sovereign God is still Lord. Those in our culture who are opposed to our Lord, His Scripture and the Gospel are in a dreadful state, a very dangerous state and potentially disastrous if they don't turn toward the Gospel. Rather than being intimidated or held back, I need to respond as David did. I need my feet shorn with the Gospel of peace to sprint into the battle, to look forward to what God will use me for in the midst of Spiritual conflict.

He is the Lord of glory and those who Satan is using for his own glory, I pity, I regret, I feel sorry for them. They are not going to find a friendly ear with me. I don't mind debating or discussing or opposing to their face with the truth of Scripture but never to be intimidated but to love, never to be put off but to pray for them and have compassion for those who are in desperate straits. Unless they come to Christ they will be facing disaster. King David facing impossible odds here took courage and ran to the battle line and so do we. That's why Paul says in II Timothy 1:12, [12] *This is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.* Praise the Lord, let's pray together.

Prayer:

Father, we thank You so much that we serve a risen, sovereign God, the Lord of heaven and earth. Lord, we are so prone at times to look around when opposition rises and when the tide seems to turn against those who would know You, to wring our hands and wonder what You're up to, but Lord we rejoice that You know what You're up to. Even when we don't, we trust You and we ask for courage to stand against the forces of darkness but Lord, we also ask for compassion that we see those around us, sometimes our friends, our parents, our children or those we work with everyday, who have been hostile with God. Lord, I pray that, that compassion would pour out and that You might use us to share the Gospel but at the same time the peace of God which passes all understanding and guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, might characterize us in such a way that the power of God can be seen. I thank You, Lord Jesus and we pray these prayers in Jesus' Name and for His Sake, Amen.

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