

August 29th 2010 Armour series #5 "Footwear For Peace" : Luke 4:14-22

It has been said by some that the footwear of the Roman Soldiers was what won Rome her Empire. And when one considers the following description of them we can get an idea of why they made such a claim.

"The Shoes or sandals of the Roman soldier were no normal footwear. Great care was taken by Rome to supply the soldiers with appropriate footwear for their assignment. Their shoes consisted of an elaborately cut and laced sandal of which the sole was layers of metal and leather with 'hob nail' spikes extending one-half inch, to in some cases 'inches,' from the sole to plant into the ground to keep them from being moved."

A forerunner perhaps of modern day football boots, except the studs on these shoes were nails, half an inch long! When the enemy threw their bodies at them with great force, intending to literally push them out of their country, the Roman soldiers stood shoulder to shoulder, put their shields up, dug their spikes firmly into the earth and they were virtually un-moveable. Then slowly but surely they would begin to advance, one foot at a time.

And so they built the Roman Empire. Country by country. And what they bought with them they proclaimed, was pax Roma.....The peace of Rome. Peace that was connected with the freedom to travel through the Empire without fear from hostile forces, for the Roman might was supreme. But the cost of that peace was freedom for so many.

For the Roman soldier of course, these shoes with spikes would have been their combat boots. They would not have worn them around the barracks when they were relaxing or playing table tennis, or the first century equivalent. But they did keep them close and available. They could put them on at a moment's notice and be ready to make that stand or to advance into new territory. They were used to wearing them and using them to advantage, and so they were always prepared to maintain, promote, or pursue the Roman peace.

Now when Paul equates the Roman soldier's footwear to the shoes that are a part of the Christians armour, he also links them with Peace, but it's a peace that gives freedom and gives hope. Ephesians 6;15 says:-

¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.

Now I am sure that it is already becoming obvious to you, as it is to me, why Paul made use of the Soldier's footwear to emphasize the believer's responsibility to spread the good news about Jesus.

For the soldiers boots were critical as far as the extension of the Roman Empire or, as the Romans liked to express it, the blessing of Roman Peace into the world, was concerned. For without the proper boots on—boots that enabled them to move across the ground; to stand when they needed to and to advance against opposition—the armour was purely cosmetic. What use being clothed in a way that will protect you if your feet are slipping and sliding all over the place because you neglected to put your boots on.

In like manner the shoes are a vital part of the Christian's armour. It is the shoes, more than other parts of the armour, that are about being effective in spreading the good news about peace. In practical terms the shoes are more about advancing the cause of the Gospel than anything else. It is true that we should earnestly seek to put on the belt of truth so that we have the right knowledge, and be clothed in righteousness so that we are protected, but unless our feet are shod, as Paul puts it, with the readiness to share the Gospel of peace, then we tend to be wearing the armour without going out to the battlefield.

So look again at Ephesians 6:15 and consider the main points that Paul makes about these shoes that are part of the armour we need to put on.

Ephesians 6:15 New King James Version (NKJV)

¹⁵ and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace;

The having shod literally means 'to bind on' and has reference to the fact that the Roman sandals had leather thongs that tied the footwear firmly to your feet. **But it's the word Preparation that is clearly important here.** It can also be translated as readiness.

We need to be prepared at all times to share this good news of peace with others. The Apostle Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

I particularly like the way that the Contemporary English Version puts it: -
Honor Christ and let him be the Lord of your life. Always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope.

What John shared with us this morning about material that he carries with him is part of that. Material that simply explains what he believes and trusts in and can so easily be referred to when needed. That's being prepared.

But being prepared doesn't mean waiting till you are absolutely sure that you have got everything right before you talk to someone. Because we go forth in the power of the Spirit and not our own strength we need to trust Him to give us the words and to teach us on the job.

Before I left on my recent holiday I knew that I wanted to do a fair amount of walking so I bought a new pair of shoes with that in mind. I chose a light pair that would be comfortable. In reality the shoes were too light for the job and didn't give me enough grip when I really needed it. I walked a lot further than I thought I would and consequently the soles began to wear through in places and I ended up having to plug those holes with cardboard each morning before I ventured out. You could say my preparation was a little lacking, but the shoes did the job, and from using them I learnt a lot that will help me to be better prepared next time. It is the same with sharing with others the good news about Jesus. We won't always feel that we got it right, but with the Spirit's help you will achieve what He wants you to achieve, and you will gain from it knowledge that will help you the next time.

The other main point that Paul makes about these shoes is that our feet are ***shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.***

The word Gospel has become something of a technical term in the church. We think of the four Gospels, and of the Gospel as the explanation of the way of Salvation, and such usage is correct. But we do need to remember that in the first century the term gospel was an everyday word that simply meant good or joyous news. So a person would share with their friends the

good news about their engagement to be married, or the safe birth of a child, or the gaining of a job. Indeed, anything that really excited you that you wanted to share with others was good news or gospel.

Paul refers here though to **the** good news, **the** gospel, because this good news stands apart from any other good news. It is the best good news that anyone could ever hear, and that anyone could ever share. It is the good news of peace. Not the pax Roma of the Romans which was built on violence and would fade away. But the peace that Christ brings into the world. Peace between man and God that changes our lives and our situations forever.

This is the good news of peace that Jesus referred to in the synagogue at Nazareth early in His ministry. Quoting from the book of Isaiah He said, as recorded in Luke 4:18-19,(part of our reading today):-

***¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to preach good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to release the oppressed,
¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

This good news of peace includes the message of salvation. That is a major part of it. But the Gospel of peace also includes words and acts of kindness and compassion to those who are poor, prisoners, blind. It involves each of us being ready to be a channel of peace to others as well as being the mouthpiece for the words of eternal life.

In fact, it is not audacious to take those words that Jesus spoke and apply them to ourselves as His servants. The Contemporary English version of Luke 4:18-19 puts it like this, and it's worth all of us reading them in the first person:-

¹⁸"The Lord's Spirit
has come to me,
because he has chosen me
to tell the good news
to the poor.
The Lord has sent me

to announce freedom
for prisoners,
to give sight to the blind,
to free everyone
who suffers,
¹⁹and to say, 'This is the year the Lord has chosen.' "

So we can see what putting on these shoes means for us and why we must do so, and yet many of us will still hesitate. We may still feel inadequate or perhaps, that, compared to others, we will never share the Gospel of peace well enough.

To overcome this we must first promote in our hearts the desire to share what we can with others. The desire to help others avoid that terrible judgment that is to come. The CEV translates this verse in this way:-

Contemporary English Version (CEV)

¹⁵Your desire to tell the good news about peace should be like shoes on your feet.

But as well as encouraging that desire in our hearts we need to remind ourselves that sharing this good news is something we are to do in our own way. We must do so according to who we are and that will be quite different to the way others do so.

I was listening to a lady on the radio talking about her childhood and how she had learning difficulties that set her apart from other kids. She felt that she was always being put down at school by teachers and students alike and never wanted to attempt anything because she knew she would fail. Then one day, when she was 10 years old, she was picked randomly to take part in a lego competition where each child had to create something from lego. As she looked at the other kids working away she saw that everyone in that group was making a house. And the houses they were making were beautiful. And she so wanted to make a house just like theirs but she just couldn't. So in dismay she made what she could make which was a little man and a tank. To her great surprise she won, not only the small local competition but the National competition that her entry was automatically entered into. And she recounted how that changed her thinking completely. She had so wanted to be like everyone else but in fact she won by being different. She won by being herself.

When we go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit desirous to share the Gospel of truth we will win for Jesus, whatever result we may see for our words or actions. And we will win by being ourselves and acting or speaking according to whom we are, for that is what God wants from us.
