

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. 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. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints.

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

I always had an appreciation for radio broadcaster Paul Harvey. His daily broadcast, *The Rest of the Story*, surprised listeners with unknown tales about famous American figures—and sometimes about Canadians, too. But Paul Harvey also offered critical commentary about the state of American culture. In one such commentary in 1964, he wrote an essay titled “If I Were the Devil,” intended to be a warning to America against the moral decay and societal collapse so apparent to him. His approach in the essay was to describe how the devil would attack the nation. One version of the essay states, “With flattery and promises of power I would get the courts to vote against God and in favour of pornography. Thus I would evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, then from the Houses of Congress. Then in his own churches I’d substitute psychology for religion and deify science. If I were Satan I’d make the symbol of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle. If I were Satan I’d just keep doing what I’m doing.”

It should come as no surprise to any of us that Satan does keep on doing what he is doing and that he is working hard, even in—or especially in—our day and age. He constantly seeks to undermine God in our schools, in our institutions and yes, even in the church. He works in ways we often fail to see. He works to create fear and uncertainty in our world and in our lives. But our biggest concerns do not tend to be global. We are more concerned with the issues that we deal with in our lives day by day. There is the stress with work; there are the struggles at home or with our health. We wonder at times why it seems the whole world has been dumped on us.

I know that most people think of the devil as nothing more than horror movie fodder, or as a mythical creation of the church to scare people into submission, but the devil is real and he is at work, seeking to destroy us by leading us to despair of God’s goodness and mercy in Christ. We may not know for sure how or when the devil will attack, but we can be sure that it will happen. The question is: are we ready for his attacks? Are we prepared to stand firm and stand strong, no matter what the devil may bring into our lives?

Paul assures us that we can be ready and that we can emerge victorious over all the worries and troubles that the devil brings. We do it as we stand ***strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might***. When God is our refuge and strength; when we are covered in the glorious armour He provides for us through the Holy Spirit, then we not only stand firm and steadfast against the devil and all his evil hosts—we overcome them.

The more troubled this world becomes, the more we need to be strong in the Lord. That is the only answer to the worries and troubles of life. It is the only way to beat the devil. Disaster experts lament the fact that people don’t prepare for the times of trouble and note that there are four stages of denial: One is, it won’t happen. Two is, if it does happen, it won’t happen to me. Three: if it does happen to me, it won’t be all that bad. And four: if it does happen to me and it’s bad, there is nothing I can do to stop it anyway.

Are we really that naive? Hasn’t the reality of life taught us anything? The truth is that we are often naive or blind or ignorant. We aren’t ready for what Paul calls in our text ***the evil day***. Paul isn’t thinking about COVID or natural disasters or war or famine or the things of the world. He is talking about the spiritual warfare that the devil wages in the midst of all these things and so many more. And yes, the devil is the real enemy. Peter tells us: ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*** (1 Peter 5:8 - ESV) God calls us to careful preparation for the

struggle that is around us, and which we cannot avoid. He also warns us about *the schemes of the devil*. Satan often pounces upon us unawares, working with all his power and with all the forces of darkness, seeking to destroy us. Martin Luther put it this way: *The old evil foe Now means deadly woe; Deep guile and great might Are his dread arms in fight; On earth is not his equal.* (LSB 656, st. 1)

There is an old story that the devil was having a yard sale, and all of his tools were marked with different prices. They were a fiendish lot. There was hatred, jealousy, deceit, lying, pride--all at expensive prices. But over to the side of the yard on display was a tool more worn and used than any of the other tools. It was also the most costly. The tool was labelled, *discouragement*. When questioned, the devil said, "It's more useful to me than any other tool. When I can't bring down my victims with any of the rest of these tools, I use discouragement, because so few people realize that it belongs to me."

All the problems of this world, all the things that give you cause for concern each day, all the disappointments of your life are rooted in sin and in the evil at work through the devil's attacks on your life. Behind all evil at work in this world, you will find the devil. His goal is to destroy everything God has done. He wants us to think we can be our own god, doing as we please, while ignoring God and His call to holiness. He wants to divide God's people, to have them angry and bitter towards one another. The devil seeks to mess up the beauty of God's creation. He tries to disrupt our lives with so many problems, disappointments and sorrows that we fall into despair and are easy prey for his attacks on our lives. The devil uses the power of sin and death to work against us. And he is good at what he does.

But the devil is not invincible. He is not all powerful. We can stand against him--when we stand *strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*. And so Paul tells us to put on the whole armour of God. *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. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.* To put on the armour of God is to cover ourselves in what God has done to save us from the devil's evil ways. Our security from the devil is not found in our strength and ability. It is found in the power of God at work for us. God has already defeated the devil. The devil was defeated once and for all at the cross, where Jesus Christ, the true God, does battle with Satan for the souls of all mankind. To the casual observer it must have looked like a losing battle, as the Saviour of the world died that horrible death on the cross. Jesus offered Himself in our place, suffering the punishment we deserve because of our sin so that He can cover us with His forgiving grace and thereby set us free from the devil and his evil power of sin and death. In rising again from the dead, Jesus showed that He truly is the victor and that Satan's power had been destroyed forever. When we are clothed by faith in His righteousness and in the life-giving, life-changing power of His death and resurrection, we are able to stand against the devil and his wicked works and ways.

We don't put on this armour, expecting to sit back in our favourite easy chair and watch television. We dress for battle because we are going into battle. And in that battle, Christians never dare be weaklings. Paul speaks of power and strength and might. Yes, our struggle is a difficult one. As Paul says: *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.* But as we stand firm in Christ, clothed in the armour of God, we do resist and overcome the wiles of the devil.

Many of the great saints of Scripture, as well as those we know throughout history, had their struggles with the devil. In the upper room, before His crucifixion, Jesus says to Peter: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."* (Luke 22:31-32, ESV) We know that Luther struggled with the devil. He often felt the devil's attacks upon his faith and life. There were times when he felt life too much to bear. But he also knew the answer to these struggles. It wasn't found in himself, but in the power and strength of God. In one time of great despair, when he was feeling very much the devil's attacks, Luther took a piece of chalk and wrote the word *vivit* across the walls and floor and desk of his study. The word *vivit* is Latin for "He lives". Luther found strength in the assurance that Christ lives, and that we, too, will live with Him.

That is our true strength: Jesus Christ is our living Lord and Saviour. Jesus Himself reminds us: *When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted and divides his spoil.* (Luke 11:21-22 - ESV) Christ is the victor, and we stand firm and strong in all things because of His victory over sin, death and the devil. Even though I can't stand here today and tell you that everything is going to be wonderful in your life, I can assure you of this: when we are clothed in the armour of God; when we are *strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might*, then we are ready for the evil day. We are ready for the devil and His attacks. And we shall stand as the victors, in the Lord who has truly won the victory for us. Amen.

