

Helmet of Salvation

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- [0 : 0 0] Yes, the devil is real. He's real. He's a present threat. That's why Peter tells us to be sober-minded, be watchful. And that's why Paul tells us to put on the whole armor of God. But again, the devil cannot snatch a genuine believer out of the Father's hand. It is utterly impossible. It cannot happen. So we have to find a balance here in our thinking. We shouldn't make a joke of the devil. We shouldn't laugh him off or become complacent in our spiritual warfare. Meanwhile, we don't want to become unnecessarily fearful either. Satan doesn't have any more power than God allows him to have. He cannot do anything more than God allows him to do. So ultimately, we trust in God to protect us and keep a tight grip on Satan's leash. No matter how far he allows that leash to extend, we trust. That he's got it. He's holding on to it. And that devil's not going any farther than God allows.
- [1 : 0 6] So we see how prevalent demonic forces were in Ephesus. And we see that the devil is ultimately powerless to stop what God is doing in that place. And third, we see just how determined the devil is to destroy. Just think about this. There's probably some demonic influence over these Jewish exorcists. They're certainly not doing the Lord's work. They're not advancing the kingdom. Instead, they crave this miraculous power they see at work in Paul. And they attempt to draw upon this power to cast out evil spirits. But it's just like Jesus said. If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. You would think these demons and these exorcists would be on the same side. And they were, in effect, on the same side. Yet, the exorcists are trying to drive out the demons. And the demons respond by attacking the exorcists. You likely remember when Jesus met the madman with a legion of unclean spirits. [2 : 1 7] And once those unclean spirits knew they were in the presence of the Son of the Most High God, they gave up the fight. They knew they were helpless against Christ. And what did they do? They begged to be sent into a herd of pigs. Send us to the pigs and let us enter them. Why? Well, we're told. The unclean spirits came out of the man and entered the pigs. And the herd, numbering about 2,000, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and drowned in the sea. Destruction. That was it. They had no greater cause, no higher purpose. It was as though their nature was simply to destroy, even if they destroyed themselves in the process. I mean, who cares? Destruction. Destruction. Devour. I suppose it's a good thing the Lord equips us with His armor. With that in mind. [3 : 1 6] We're not fighting our spiritual battles according to some sort of gentleman's agreement. The devil does not abide by any rules for war.

Destruction. That's his aim. That's his nature. He did it in the Garden of Eden. He did it in the murder of Abel. He did it on the cross of Christ. It's the one thing you can count on with him.

No matter how attractive or how enticing his temptations are, just remember, he only wants to destroy. Now look what happens here in verse 17.

Not only is the devil powerless against God, but God uses the devil for his purpose. So while the devil is essentially destroying himself, his cause, God is building his church, which is the one thing the devil does not want to see happen.

And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also, many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices.

[4 : 27] And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver.

That's nearly \$6 million adjusted for inflation. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

Now for just a moment, I want to jump ahead. Let's leave the story of Acts right here for just a moment and turn back over to Ephesians. I want to get Paul's theological understanding of what was happening.

Of course, we could turn to Romans, we could turn to a number of his letters, but it makes sense to consider what he tells the believers in Ephesus about what was happening to them. What had happened to them.

So turn over to Ephesians chapter 1. In fact, I'll read this at length, starting with verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

[5 : 50] In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace with which he has blessed us in the beloved.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight, making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of his glory.

And I'll stop there. So this is an interesting presentation of the gospel. Paul doesn't explain our salvation in the way we might expect.

[7 : 13] Christ is mentioned, of course, but Paul's only reference to his death on the cross is the phrase, we have redemption through his blood. Our belief, or faith, is almost a footnote in the text.

So this is a very different presentation than what maybe we're accustomed to. Rather than tell us what Christ did and then implore us to believe, Paul kind of pulls back the curtain, if you will, to show us what happens behind the scenes of salvation.

And let me summarize what he says. First, he explains God the Father's role in salvation. He chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

Before we were even created, God graciously and sovereignly elected a people for salvation. Then second, God the Son died.

No, Paul doesn't go into great detail about his death here, but we find Christ in every part of this. Paul continually uses that two-word phrase that he loves to use.

[8 : 25] In him. In him. According to the purpose of the Father, at the fullness of time, Christ died in our place, suffering the penalty of sin, so that in him we have redemption through his blood.

Third, Paul does talk about our faith here. On a personal, individual level, this is our saving moment. When you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him.

And lastly, we see God the Spirit's role in our salvation. Once a sinner believes and is saved, Paul says he or she is sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

Now, have you ever stopped to wonder why the Bible teaches us some of these things? For example, why do we need to know that God chose us before the foundation of the world?

Does that change anything? For all practical purposes, obviously we need to know that Christ died, and we need to know why, and we need to understand that it is faith alone that justifies us, but what about the doctrine of election?

[9 : 52] I mean, far more Christians would get along with one another if the Bible never said anything about election. So why is it taught? This happened before we were ever created.

Why do we need to know this? Well, the first reason most theologians would give is that it glorifies God, and it humbles us, and that is certainly true.

Certainly true. I think it was Spurgeon who said, the Lord must have loved me before I was born, because He wouldn't have loved me after. But I believe we can point to another reason.

Paul makes something very clear when he writes to the Ephesians. I suppose he could have simply pointed to the moment when they believed, and the moment when the second part of this great exchange took place, Christ died for their sins, and when they believed, they took on Christ's righteousness.

It was imputed to them through faith. I mean, that's salvation in a nutshell, right? Our sin was imputed to Christ. His righteousness is imputed to us when we believe. But instead, Paul pulls back the curtain to show us what God has been doing to save us ever since, even before the world began.

[11 : 12] Why? To humble us? Yes. For His glory? Absolutely. But also, knowing what God has done, knowing what He is doing, and knowing what He will do to save His people is a tremendous encouragement to us.

We weren't saved just because we happened to hear the gospel and just because we happened to be in the mood to believe that day. The plan of salvation was not something that was thrown together last minute as the Lord, you know, scrambled to figure out what to do after Adam's sin in the garden.

No, this was the plan. This was always the plan. Before He ever created the world, God determined to save a people. Better yet, He determined and chose the very people He would save.

He determined that He would send His Son to die in our place. Then He determined that His Spirit would act as a down payment on our ultimate redemption, our final redemption, until we acquire possession of it.

In other words, God is and has always been in full control of our salvation. And that's why Jesus could say, My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

[12 : 37] From before time itself to the end of time, all-powerful, almighty God is in control of our salvation. Paul says it this way in Romans 8, if God be for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? He goes on, No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, we might say, nor the devil, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else, in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[13 : 54] Period. Amen. Paul explains salvation the way he does to the Ephesians so that they might be encouraged.

He doesn't want them or us to ever think that salvation is dependent upon us. You know, our faithfulness, our works, our power.

No, it is entirely dependent upon God's faithfulness, His works, His power. And if we don't understand this, well, the devil, he will use it against us.

So briefly, let me just summarize the rest of the Ephesian story in Acts 19. Paul's ministry there was so effective that the local idol makers felt threatened.

You know, if people turned away from idolatry, they're out of business. Their business was to make and sell the idols. So, long story short, they create pandemonium in the city.

[14 : 59] It is chaos. We're told the city was filled with confusion. The idol makers want to put an end to this Christian nonsense as they see it, and they provoke the whole city to throw a big tantrum about it.

Paul and the others, they're threatening our way of life. And again, we see what the devil does. He can't stop the gospel from spreading. He can't stop sinners from being saved, but he continues fighting.

He works through the unbelievers in Ephesus to rise up against Paul and against the church. Thankfully, though, that's the most he can do in that situation. God yanks back the devil's leash and doesn't allow him to hurt Paul or any of the other Christians.

And after a couple of hours, the crowd is dispersed and the disaster is averted. Okay. So that concludes my introduction to the helmet of salvation.

How much time do we have left? Obviously, when Paul tells the Ephesians to take the helmet of salvation, he's not telling them to get saved.

[16 : 13] We can rule that out because as we saw in Acts 19 and Ephesians 1, he's writing to people who are already saved. He's writing to people who cannot become unsaved.

So what is this helmet? Well, first of all, this is the most obvious thing. It's a defense against the devil. Right?

It's not defending us against Satan robbing us of salvation, but it's a defense nonetheless. We saw how the devil operated in Ephesus. We may know he cannot overcome the Lord's will and he cannot snatch us out of the Father's hand, but that does not stop him from attacking, from doing all the damage he can possibly do that does not stop him from trying to devour us.

Second, this helmet is called the helmet of salvation, but Paul gives it a slightly different name elsewhere. Here's what he writes in 1 Thessalonians 5.

This is verses 8 and 9. Let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

[17 : 27] For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. So notice what he says there. Paul reminds us of the eternal plan of God.

God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation. It is positively certain. If you are in Christ, it is positively certain.

If you are saved, you will be saved. Therefore, he says, put on the helmet of the hope of salvation.

What is Paul really talking about? He's talking about assurance. He's talking about knowing the promises of God and being confident that we will see those promises fulfilled.

We have eternal security, Paul essentially says. Now believe it. With every fiber of your being, believe it. And third and final, Paul wants believers to put on the hope of salvation on their heads.

[18 : 39] On their heads. This is a helmet. It protects the head from attacks. In this case, it protects the head, it protects the mind from the devil's spiritual attacks.

Think back to what I said about Paul's reasoning with the people in Ephesus. I said he engaged their minds. You see, Christianity is not a religion of all feelings.

It's not. It's not altogether about the heart, we might say. It is about the heart. It is about the heart, of course. But it's also about the mind.

It's about our intellect. It's about what we know and what we think and how we think. Paul said in Colossians 3.2, Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

And he said that right after telling the Colossians that believers are raised with Christ who is now seated next to his Father in heaven. Think about Christ.

[19 : 47] Think about what he's done. Think about what he's promised to do yet. Never mind the havoc that is being wreaked by the devil all over this earth. Set your mind on things above.

Elsewhere, Paul says to the Philippians in Philippians 4, Brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things and the God of peace will be with you. If we want to protect ourselves against the devil, we must guard our minds.

If we want peace, we must consume our thoughts with good things, heavenly things, specifically, the hope of our salvation.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you and we praise you for the wonderful, profound truths that are provided to us through your word.

[21 : 11] to know that even before time began, you chose us as a people and you have saw to it that everything that is necessary to be your people, to dwell on the new earth with you one day, has been accomplished by you and nothing can thwart your plan.

Lord, we're thankful to know that we have the hope of salvation, to know that your promises are as sure as though they are already done. But I do pray that we would all have a willingness and the ability to put that helmet on to focus all of our days on these promises and on you and on heavenly things so that we would not become distracted, that we would not become discouraged in any way, that the devil would have no ground to take our thoughts captive.

We know ultimately he cannot snatch us from your hand. But Lord, we still fight this battle every day in our hearts and in our minds and we ask for your help.

All for your glory, I pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.