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David charges Solomon and the people. Put on the whole armour of God.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Chronicles 28. David assembled at Jerusalem all the officials of Israel, the officials of the tribes, the officers of the divisions that served the king, the commanders of thousands, the commanders of hundreds, the stewards of all the property and livestock of the king and his sons, together with the palace officials, the mighty men, and all the seasoned warriors. Then King David rose to his feet and said, Hear me, my brothers and my people.

I had it in my heart to build a house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God, and I made preparations for building. But God said to me, You may not build a house for my name, for you are a man of war and have shed blood. Yet the Lord God of Israel chose me from all my father's house to be king over Israel forever.

For he chose Judah as leader, and in the house of Judah my father's house, and among my father's sons he took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel. And of all my

sons, for the Lord has given me many sons, he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel. He said to me, It is Solomon your son who shall build my house and my courts, for I have chosen him to be my son, and I will be his father.

I will establish his kingdom forever if he continues strong in keeping my commandments and my rules as he is today. Now therefore, in the sight of all Israel, the assembly of the Lord, and in the hearing of our God, observe and seek out all the commandments of the Lord your God, that you may possess this good land and leave it for an inheritance to your children after you forever. And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought.

If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever. Be careful now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary. Be strong and do it.

Then David gave Solomon his son the plan of the vestibule of the temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms, and its inner chambers, and of the room for the mercy seat, and the plan of all that he had in mind for the courts of the house of the Lord, all the surrounding chambers, the treasuries of the house of God, and the treasuries for the dedicated gifts, for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the service in the house of the Lord, for all the vessels for the service in the house of the Lord, the weight of gold for all golden vessels for each service, the weight of silver vessels for each service, the weight of the golden lampstands and their lamps, the weight of gold for each lampstand and its lamps, the weight of silver for a lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand in the service, the weight of gold for each table of the showbread, the silver for the silver tables, and pure gold for the forks, the basins, and the cups, for the golden bowls and the weight of each, for the silver bowls and the weight of each, for the altar of incense made of refined gold and its weight, also his plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord, all this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the Lord, all the work to be done according to the plan. Then David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and courageous and do it. Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, is with you.

He will not leave you or forsake you until all the work for the service of the house of the Lord is finished. And behold the divisions of the priests and the Levites for all the service of the house of God. And with you in all the work will be every willing man who has skill for any kind of service.

Also the officers and all the people will be holy at your command. In the concluding chapters of 1 Chronicles, David addresses the assembly of Israel. The opening verse of

chapter 28 is an extensive list of all of the officials and luminaries of the nation who are included.

These concluding addresses prepare Israel for the great building project of the temple and for the succession of the throne from David to Solomon. A building project on the scale of the temple would require the entire nation to be united and pulling together. It would require peace and security in the land, wise governance, strong supply chains and a well-ordered workforce.

The building of the temple would finally secure the centralization of the worship of the nation as the Lord had required of it in Deuteronomy chapter 12 verses 5 to 14. But you shall seek the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there. There you shall go and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, your vow offerings, your free will offerings and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock.

And there you shall eat before the Lord your God and you shall rejoice, you and your households, in all that you undertake, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you. But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, then to the place that the Lord your God will choose to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you, your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the Lord.

And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male servants and your female servants, and the Levite that is within your towns, since he has no portion or inheritance with you. Take care that you do not offer your burnt offerings at any place that you see, but at the place that the Lord your God will choose in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I am commanding you. Now, after countless years of a moving, relocating or divided sanctuary and of various sites of worship, Israel will finally have the central, single sanctuary that the Lord intended for them to have.

The political significance of this development for the nation is immense. The centralisation of worship would exert a centripetal force on the nation, a nation that was always in danger of fragmenting along its regional and tribal fault lines. The establishment of a central sanctuary also went hand in hand with the establishment of a king, who would build and maintain that central site of worship, and ensure that people didn't simply worship the Lord in whatever way seemed right in their own eyes.

David's desire had been to build the temple himself, as a house of rest for the Ark of the Covenant and the footstool of God. The Ark and the mercy seat over it represented the Lord's throne. The Ark as the footstool of the throne was the place where worship was directed towards.

However, David was not permitted to build the temple himself. He was a man of war, a man who pacified the enemies on all sides and secured the throne in the land, so that the man coming after him could reign over a peaceful and firmly established kingdom, and so that he could build the temple. Building a settled house of rest for the throne of the Lord before peace was secured on all sides would be premature.

David recounted the way that the Lord had graciously chosen him, choosing Judah among the tribes to be their leader, Jesse's house from Judah, David from among his brothers, and from all of David's sons, Solomon as the appointed successor. It was in Solomon that the promise of the Davidic covenant would be realised, if Solomon remained steadfast in keeping the word of the Lord. The promise of the covenant was conditional upon faithfulness to the law of Moses.

This was the case for the people in general, and also for Solomon himself, to whom David now turned, addressing him in the presence of the larger gathering of the nation's leaders. Solomon has the assurance of the Lord's favour and promise, and the honour of being commissioned to build a house for the Lord, which should inspire him to labour faithfully. His service of the Lord must be sincere, from an undivided heart and with a willing mind.

If he seeks the Lord, the Lord is there to be found by him. However, if he rejects the Lord, the Lord will reject him. David delivers the plans of the temple and its service to Solomon.

The plans of the temple had all been delivered to David by the Lord, and he had written them down, much as the Lord had delivered the plans of the tabernacle to Moses on Mount Sinai. However, David does not have to climb a mountain and have a theophanic revelation to have the plans of the temple delivered to him. The Lord gives the plans to David more directly, in a way that seems to conscript David's own creativity to the cause.

In the building of the tabernacle, Moses had been given the plans, and Bezalel had been given wisdom for the building. In the building of the temple, David was given the plans, and Solomon was given great wisdom for the building, as he would be the lead temple builder. Solomon would be assisted by wise master craftsmen like Hiram.

In scripture, as James Jordan has observed, we see a number of cases of God giving the blueprints of his house to a prophet, who appoints a lead tentmaker or builder, who then enlists further craftsmen and builders to assist him. All of this anticipates the way that

the Lord builds the house of his church. The temple is not merely designed for a magnificent appearance, or for narrow functional purposes, but for a deep symbolism.

The precision of the plans and their execution is necessary for the preservation and the communication of this meaning. As Moses had charged Joshua to be strong and courageous, David charges his son Solomon. David's speech here to the leaders of Israel and to Solomon is closely parallel to Moses' speech to Israel and Joshua before his death, exhorting the nation and committing them to the oversight of his successor.

For instance, the words of David's exhortation to Solomon are very similar to those of Moses to Joshua in Deuteronomy 31, verses 7-8. And you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you.

He will be with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

David and Moses are similar in a number of respects. Much as Moses was unable to enter into the land of rest on account of his sin at the waters of Meribah and his association with a rebellious people, David is unable to build a temple on account of his shedding of blood. Solomon's building of the temple is presented as a completion of the Exodus in many ways.

He is a new Joshua. However, David dies just short of entry into the fulfilment. This happens because David is a man of war and has shed blood.

In some respects, this is simply a matter of David's work being preparatory. However, there is also an element of judgement. Shedding blood almost invariably has negative connotations in scripture, connotations that I suspect it also has here.

A question to consider. How does the way that David describes Solomon's position relative to the Davidic covenant suggest that the divinely granted stature of Solomon's throne would exceed his own? Ephesians chapter 6 Bond-servants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by way of eye-service, as people please, but as bond-servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bond-servant or is free. Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

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, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly as I ought to speak. So that you also may know how I am, and what I am doing, Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will tell you everything. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ, with love incorruptible. In Ephesians chapter 6 Paul concludes his household code and gives a final exhortation to the recipients of the epistle.

The fact that Paul addresses children directly, with the instruction to obey their parents, is probably notable. Children, and there is little reason to believe that Paul isn't addressing boys and girls alike here, are not just treated as those to be dictated to and controlled by their parents, but as persons to be exhorted to a willing obedience. The presence of such an instruction suggests that Paul expected children to be with their parents in hearing this epistle read.

Christian teaching, and willing Christian obedience, is not just for adults. They are to obey their parents in the Lord. One thing that we see in places such as the book of Acts, for instance, is the assumption that whole households would come under the reign of Christ, not just detached individuals one by one.

Children are addressed as members of the Christian community, and Paul will go on to instruct fathers to raise them in the instruction of Christ. The expectation is that as such children are raised in the faith, they will grow into a full, willing and mature ownership of the faith for themselves. This is why honouring of parents and the faithful teaching of parents is so important.

As in the Old Testament, these are the means by which children will grow into such mature personal faith. Paul supports his teaching with a reference to the fifth commandment, underlining the importance of the promise attached to it. Honouring of father and mother is seen in a particularly potent form in willing obedience to them.

Such honouring of parents creates a firm bond between the generations that functions as the backbone of a people through its history. A people lacking such a healthy bond will not last long, but those who have such a bond will live long and prosper in the land. Fathers, for their part, must encourage rather than frustrate or provoke their children.

There is a reciprocity here. The father is the head of the household, but his headship is supposed to be something that builds up, strengthens, supports, encourages and gives security and peace to everyone else. An overbearing, abusive or hypercritical form of fatherhood is opposed here.

Fathers should direct and correct their children, but their strength must be exercised with gentleness and compassion. It must be something that supports and elevates and edifies their children. From fathers, Paul turns to servants.

They are called to obey their masters with fear and trembling, to show respect, to act with sincerity and to act as to the Lord. This is not just acting as if to the Lord, but as to the Lord. Their true master is not their earthly master, but their heavenly master, Jesus Christ.

And so they act as one who will be seen by him, as one whose work will be judged by him. Whatever the cruelty or injustice of their earthly masters, they know that their heavenly master will see and honour their work as it is done in a way that glorifies him. They are called to act for his honour and for his recognition, not for human attention.

Such faithfulness could sometimes be costly. We can think of the story of Joseph, whose faithfulness to his earthly master, not as a people pleaser, but as one who was acting towards God, led to him being thrown into prison. By being faithful to Potiphar and not sleeping with Potiphar's wife, he ended up seeming unfaithful to Potiphar.

Yet the Lord, his true master, blessed him and raised him up. Servants are assured that whatever they do, they will receive back from the Lord. And this is something that is true for people whether they are bond-servant or free.

The Lord sees and rewards those who do good. And there's an important point about Christian vocation here. So often we can idealise those situations where people are not alienated from their labour in any ways.

They're doing exactly what they want in communities that they feel that they really belong in, in situations where they feel highly rewarded for their efforts. However here Paul talks to people who are servants, who might be beaten on a daily basis, who might find themselves routinely dishonoured in their labours, prevented from enjoying ownership of their labour and its fruits, or from finding true belonging and identity in what they do. While all these conditions of work are bad and in an ideal society would be removed or minimised or even eradicated, for Paul it does not prevent people from

knowing the dignity of serving Christ.

Even the humblest servant can find honour in his labour as he does his work towards Christ and not to man. Paul now addresses slave owners, introducing his remarks with a surprising expression. Masters do the same to them.

There is a symmetry between the way that masters should treat their servants and servants should treat their masters. It's very hard to believe we can think of this relationship between masters and servants as the most unequal and imbalanced and asymmetrical relationship there is. But Paul can see a symmetry because both people should be acting towards a heavenly master and treating their earthly counterpart, whether a master or a slave, in a way that recognises God's oversight of them.

One of the effects of all of this is to place the social order that currently exists in the light of how we all stand relative to God on the same level ground. While many would have sought to drive the current order down deep into the depths of reality to claim its grounds in fundamental being, Paul does quite the opposite. He presents a more fundamental reality that reveals the superficiality and transitory character of a society where there are masters and slaves.

We should also recognise the contrast between the way that he treats masters and servants and the ways that he treats husbands and wives. Husbands and wives are related directly to the gospel. The relationship between husband and wife is an anticipation of the gospel of Christ, the joining together of Christ and his church.

In the process, the fundamental goodness and divine intention of marriage is stressed. No such connection is made with slavery, however. Paul makes similar points here to those he made in Colossians 4.1. Masters treat your bond-servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven.

Masters are charged to stop threatening their servants. They must recognise that they too have a master in heaven. By this reminder, Paul is reconstituting the institution of slavery by the golden rule.

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets, and by Christ's principle of judgment. For with the judgment you pronounce, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Masters must act towards their servants as those who are themselves bond-servants of Christ, accountable to him, and answerable for how they treat other persons made in God's image.

There is no partiality with God. The status of the slave-owner does not exalt him over others in God's sight, nor does it give him some greater dignity. Christians are in a battle.

We need continual strength, which ultimately comes from the Lord. Paul expresses all of this using the imagery of clothing ourselves with armour. Such a metaphor is also found in 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 8. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.

The parallels and contrasts suggest that the point is less specific identifications than the more general effect. Paul is also here drawing upon Old Testament imagery of the Lord clothing himself for battle that we find in Isaiah 59, verses 16-17. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede.

Then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head. He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.

The enemy is the devil himself, who is cunning and a brilliant strategist. He can easily outwit and snare the careless, and render them useless. Paul began the epistle by focusing on the cosmic scale of Christ's victory, and his exaltation over all authorities and powers and principalities.

He returns to this here. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood. The image of hand-to-hand fighting devolves into wrestling.

We're wrestling against these things. In 2 Corinthians 10, verses 3-5, he makes similar points. We are caught up in a battle that is so much greater than us, like hobbits in the war for Middle Earth.

There are dark, demonic forces, and Satan himself is at work. In the light of all of this, we need to be dressed in preparation. We need to wear the armour of God so that we can withstand in the evil day and stand firm.

We face days of bitter testing and tribulation, times when the Church will not seem to be on the advance anymore, but will be hard-pressed on all sides, needing to hold its ground at all costs. The armour of God is the armour worn by the Lord himself and by the Messianic warrior, as we see in Isaiah 11, verses 1-5. The spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear. But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.

And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. Christ is the Messianic warrior whose victory over the principalities and powers was declared in chapter 1. To share in his victory, we must fight in his spirit and

with his armour.

We should also recognise the similarity between the clothing of God, his armour, and the clothing of the priest, who also has garments of salvation, a breastplate and the like. In Isaiah chapter 61 verse 10, The question of the character of the things that we are wearing is an important one. Some lean to emphasise their character as Christian virtues.

However, this might miss the fact that the armour is the armour of God and of the Messianic warrior, something that we must clothe ourselves with from without, equipping us for battle. This is part of what it means to clothe ourselves with Christ. When God clothes himself with righteousness and salvation, along with vengeance and zeal, the point is not that God needs to be covered with righteousness, or that he needs salvation.

God is clothing himself for, and even with, these actions. God's righteousness is his redemptive work of setting things to rights, his delivering work of salvation viewed from a particular perspective. When we clothe ourselves with these things, the point is less about personal virtues and more about clothing ourselves for and with God's saving work, by what God has accomplished and is accomplishing in Jesus.

We are called to act within the act of the Messianic warrior, Jesus Christ, who has won the victory over the principalities and powers and is now seated at God's right hand. We must fight his fight, clothed with him, both protected by and authorised by his clothing. However, while the Isaiah text about God's putting on his armour is about offensive battle, the focus for us will be more upon defence.

We must be alert in all of this, mindful of the many pitfalls and the perils. Our adversary is wily and cunning, and he will do anything to destroy us. Before closing the letter, Paul requests a special prayer that the Lord would give him the words that he requires as an ambassador of the Gospel in chains.

Paul is profoundly aware of his serving the Lord's mission. Unlike in his other epistles, Paul does not end with a long list of specific greetings. This, it seems to me, is because this letter is an encyclical, a letter to be sent around several churches rather than just to one.

A question to consider, what are some very practical ways in which we can put on the armour of God in our daily lives?