

Armor of God: Shield of Faith

May 12, 2024

Pastor John Mars

This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church. We are continuing in our series of sermons on “The Armor of God,” taken from Ephesians, chapter 6, beginning with verse 10.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”
May God bless the reading of His Word.

As an introvert, I live most of my life in my own head. Very little of what is going on inside of my mind anybody ever hears. Now, you extroverts think out loud. And there's advantages to both. With an extrovert thinking out loud, you could say, “Now, John, that ain't right,” or “John, that's just stupid!” But if I'm not saying anything, I can go down some really dark paths, and you'd never even know. And I have to be careful about that, because I can. I have to watch what they call “self-talk,” what I tell myself. And it's amazing how much we lie to ourselves, and how often we make mountains out of molehills. From time to time God has to jack me up about that, because I will go down some dark trails and nobody even knows it, just me and God. A number of years ago, one of those times when God got my attention occurred. It was a normal workday. I got up like I always do, early, got ready for work. Then I got my coffee. And that's when God and I have a conversation about what's going on in my life and what the workday is all about, and I go over the things that I know about. As soon as I say that I have to laugh, because in a pastor's day, there ain't nothing normal. But what I know about, I pray about, and I think about, and I go over. And my day was going to start with a meeting with a gentleman about an issue in the church. And I did what I normally do: I went over what I wanted to communicate, and I got to thinking about the possible scenarios of how that meeting might go. And I began to go down a dark path. And the farther I traveled down that path, the angrier I got. And by the time I got to my office, I was ticked off at that guy, and he hadn't even left home yet! Fortunately, God showed me the error of my way, that everything I was telling myself was happening only in my own head. None of it was real. None of it was even possible, really. And when we had our meeting, it went not well but great, and nothing came of it. Some of you are going, “Yeah, I have been there!”

Today we're talking about the shield of faith, as Paul says, with which we can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one. I'm going to contend, eventually, that some of those arrows just may be those negative thoughts that enter our head out of the clear blue

sky. In our passage today, Paul says in verse 16, "In addition to all of this, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one." Up to this point, he has talked to us about the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the gospel of peace. The belt of truth is none other than Jesus Christ, as revealed to us through the Holy Spirit, who is with us always. The breastplate of righteousness is Christ's righteousness--not our righteousness, but his righteousness, not our goodness, but his goodness. And the gospel of peace is our good news to share with our world--that God does everything we need to make us right with Him and right with one another. In other words, we've got our boots on and we're ready, we're fitted, we're ready to go. And that's enough to get started, but it's not all the armor. It's enough to get underway, but God has more in store for us. Because, you see, God doesn't want us just to survive; God wants us to thrive. God wants us to have everything we need, to have what Jesus called the abundant life. And so, there is more armor. God goes above and beyond, much like a good mother. A good mother doesn't want her children just to survive; she wants them to thrive. She wants them to have everything they need to do well in life. And that is what God wants for us. So, take the shield of faith.

I did a good bit of digging in the past about the shield of faith. Here's what you need to know. First, let's talk about the shield. There are two words in Greek for Roman shields. One word is for the personal shield that is worn typically on the left arm, that was used for a person to provide protection for particular areas of the body at particular times. It's a small one for the individual warrior. The other shield is five feet tall, over three feet wide, and four to six inches thick. It's huge. It is designed to go in front of the army. It is held by a carrier who holds it close to his body and protects himself and protects the people behind him. It is a full-body shield. And in close quarters, it is used to push the enemy back. And when flaming arrows are launched at the army, they go to one knee, and they hold the shields up and they form a wall that protects the entire infantry. Guess which one of these words Paul uses? It's the big one, the one that covers all; the one that protects all; the one that helps us with all of the temptations and all of the fiery arrows that come our way. That is the imagery that Paul wants us to have: that the shield of faith provides complete protection from all of the flaming arrows that come our way. The faith is a faith in God, not a faith in self. It is not a self-reliance; it is a God-reliance. And what is faith? The writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 said, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." By faith we believe and act on what we cannot prove, but on what we believe. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works, not by self-reliance. So, the shield of faith protects us from unbelief. It protects us from temptation. It protects us from those negative thoughts. It protects us from those arrows that come out of a clear blue sky. It protects us from "works salvation" or self-reliance. It protects us from ourselves.

I want to pause there for just a moment. I find that I am my biggest enemy. I read a book about 30 years ago now. (It's out of print. I've checked.) It's a little book about 100 pages long. The title was "Telling Yourself the Truth." And in reading that book I realized, especially with a personality such as mine where I spend a lot of my time in my own head, it is absolutely amazing how much I lie to myself; how much I de-emphasize things that I should emphasize; how much I overemphasize things I should minimize; and how much I make mountains out of molehills; how much I can take a small thing and make it into a huge thing; how much I could take a small slight and make it into a huge problem. The shield of faith can help us with that. I'm told, with that big shield, it does no good unless you hold it really close. But if you hold it really close, then the enemy can't get around it, can't get by it, and certainly cannot get

through it. But if you hold it out loosely, you don't hold it tightly, they can get around it. Same is true with our faith. We must continually remind ourselves of our personal beliefs. One of my favorite phrases in the New Testament is from this guy whose son is having some type of an issue. The disciples cannot help him. He takes his son to Jesus and says, "Sir, if you will, would you please help me?" And Jesus says, "Do you believe that I can?" And the man's response has become one of my favorite prayers. He said, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."

With the shield of faith, you must constantly keep it close and remind yourself, because those temptations and those bad and evil thoughts come out of nowhere. Maybe this just happens to me, but on occasion I get some pretty negative thoughts, right out of a clear blue sky. That ever happen to you? I believe those to be the flaming arrows. And if you pursue those thoughts, they can take you down a dark path. There have been many occasions that I have had couples in my office on the verge of a divorce, and when we began to trace the problem back, we found out that it started as something very, very small and ended up almost tearing their marriage apart. That's those flaming arrows that do so much damage.

Last but certainly not least, I have been praying about this. And in fact, I argued with myself on the way here about whether or not I was going to share this. And I am. We are bombarded constantly with misinformation, are we not? That's those flaming arrows. I remember when the war started with Russia and Ukraine. Some of the first headlines on the internet were: "In the inevitability of a nuclear war, here are the cities you want to live in." Going to the worst possible scenario immediately--those are the flaming arrows. The shield of faith will help guard you, will help protect you from going to those negative places by making situations and circumstances worse, but you must hold it close and remind yourself constantly of its existence. If not, it does no good. Let's pray.

Lord, we acknowledge that too often we neglect our faith and we do not hold it close. And the enemy is able to get around it and lead us into some very dark places. We pray, God, that You will give us the eyes of faith to see and believe. In Christ's name, amen.