

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

Ephesians 6:10-16

Faith is a high priority with God! It is the only touch point to God in all of Scripture. God said in Romans 1:17, “The just shall live by faith”. No faith, no salvation. God said in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “We walk by faith, not by sight”. No faith, no success in the Christian life. We all know that Hebrews 11:6 tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. And the entire chapter of Hebrews 11 is a roll call of patriarchs and even a matriarch or two who accomplished mighty works for the glory of God by faith. Our text tells us that if we are to protect ourselves from the fiery darts of the wicked one, we must take up the shield of faith “above all”. Now, most scholars say that the words “above all” in the NKJV and the KJV would be better translated by the words “in addition to”, and the problem is that the Greek word Paul uses can have both meanings. But in this context I believe “in addition to” is the correct rendering. Paul is saying, “In addition to putting on the belt of truth, and the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace – in addition to these take up the shield of faith”. And here’s why.

Last week we saw that the preparation of the gospel of peace was the readiness for spiritual battles that was based upon the assurance of our salvation. We are made ready to fight the enemy because we know that we’ve been washed in the blood of Jesus and we know that even though we may lose some battles we are still going to win in the end. And beloved, there is nothing more important in this world than to know without a shadow of a doubt that you are saved. Nothing could be above that.

But do you remember what we said a few weeks ago in regards to our salvation? Even though we know that we are going to win in the end, far too many believers get smacked around by the devil practically their whole life and have to come from behind in the last 30 seconds to do it. They gain heaven but they’ve lived a powerless, defeated life that has not glorified God and they’ve not taken one soul to heaven with them. But beloved, this should not be! John writes in his first epistle, “For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world, and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith (1 John 5:4). And Paul is saying to the Ephesians, “There’s something more to the Christian life than just saving faith. There is conquering faith! So in addition to saving faith take up the shield of conquering faith and go out and win some battles in Jesus’ name.”

Now, beloved, this charge to take up the shield of faith is not just a nice thing to do, it is a critical thing to do. For if we don't take up the shield of faith bad things can happen! Think about this:

- It was lack of faith caused the fall of man. Eve doubted God, enticed Adam to go along with her and ate the forbidden fruit, and plunged the world into sin. All because the serpent got her to doubt what God said was true.
- It was lack of faith that caused the first murder. If Cain had obeyed God and brought an acceptable offering it would have been received. But Cain thought that he had a better plan than God and thus was rejected, and then went out and killed his brother. Lack of faith.
- It was lack of faith that kept Moses and the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness for forty long years.
- It was lack of faith that has had the Middle East sitting on a powder keg for over 60 years. How's that, preacher? Just this. If Abraham had trusted God, he would have never taken a concubine and fathered a child to be his heir, but he would have waited on God's perfect timing to fulfill His promise of a son through Sarah. But he and Sarah didn't believe God, took matters into their own hands, and now there are millions and millions of Arabs who claim Abraham as their father through Ishmael and claim Israel as their homeland, and they will forever hate the Jews and as Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, seek to wipe them off the face of the map.

Beloved, I could go on, but do you get the point? Every one of these defeats came because of a fiery dart of doubt. The devil planted a seed of doubt in Eve's mind, in Cain's mind, and in all the rest. And they succumbed to Satan's lie and they were defeated. But none of these defeats would have happened if God's people would have lifted up the shield of faith!

But beloved, it is exactly the same way with us. Satan launches his flaming missiles at us every day, seeking to cause us to fall just as he did with the patriarchs. Let me name a few. Satan shoots his fiery darts to make some of us doubt our salvation. We think, "Did I understand what I was doing as a child?" "Did I repent sincerely enough to be saved?" "Did I have enough faith?" Others of us doubt God's provision. Satan's whispers, "You'll never pay all of your bills this month. You're going to wind up an indigent, begging from others". And we listen and we worry. He causes some of us to worry about God's provision for a godly mate in life, or for some teenagers just a godly date in life. And do you know what many Christian single adults and teenagers do? They compromise their standards because they don't

believe God can handle that part of their lives, and many wind up with broken homes and broken hearts. Satan's shoots darts of discord at others of us. Things may be going great in our marriage, and then we make a huge mistake, and then our spouse explodes with anger and bitterness, but in reality the devil has just knocked both of us out with a fiery dart.

And then Satan's shoots darts of temptation at all of us. Temptations to lust, to lie, to gossip, to steal from our employer by loafing on the job or taking home that pen or legal pad or screwdriver. And he tempts us to get lazy in our Christian commitment. And beloved, one reason that all of these things defeat us like they do is because we never realize the source from whence they come! We never realize that these trials and temptations aren't "just happening", but that they are real spiritual attacks, fiery darts, and that the enemy of our souls is behind them. And if we just realized what is happening we could lift up our shield of faith if we had one, cry out to God, and He would deliver us. And this is why faith is such a high priority with God.

But I want you to see two verses in the Word that says it all about the priority of faith. 2 Chronicles 20:20: "...**Believe** in the Lord your God, and you shall be established;..." Have faith and you will stand fast in all of your trials. Now listen to Isaiah 7:9: "...**If you will not believe**, surely you shall not be established." Beloved, it doesn't get any plainer than that does it?

But let's move now from the **priority** of faith to the **practice of faith**. We all would agree that we need to lift up the shield of faith more in our lives. But just what is the shield of faith? Well, first of all let me say that the shield of faith is not faith itself. Never place your faith in the strength of your own faith. This is huge, this is more than huge. This is the absolute key of success in the whole matter of living in victory rather than defeat. For beloved, if I am depending on my faith and you are depending on your faith to quench the missiles of hell being shot at us on a daily basis, how much confidence do you have in your shield? I don't know about you, but I don't have too much in mine. Don't get me wrong. WE need to seek a stronger faith. Jesus said, "Have faith in God" (Mark 11:22). The disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, increase our faith" (Luke 17:5).

But you see, our faith can be pretty weak at times, can't it? One day we are full of faith. The doctor calls and we got a good report from our tests. The banker calls and we got approved for our loan. The son calls and he got a promotion at work. The teacher calls and your daughter got student of the year. And God is good and great is our faith. But the next day things are different. The doctor calls and the report was wrong, and he wants to see us that afternoon. The banker calls and the loan fell through. The son calls and his company got bought out and now he has no

job at all. The teacher calls and your daughter fell off the trampoline in P.E. class and is paralyzed. Beloved, we're talking real life here. We're talking life at my house and your house. And when these things blindsides us we ask, "Where is God?", and our faith plummets. You see, the shield of faith must be something greater than our own faith.

So what is it, then, this shield of faith? Glad you asked. Beloved, the shield of faith is God Himself. Listen to what God told Abraham in Genesis 15:1, "...Do not be afraid, Abram. **I am your shield**, your exceedingly great reward." Listen to what David wrote in Psalm 18:2, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;my **shield** and the horn of my salvation..." He wrote in Psalm 84:11, "...The Lord God is a sun and **shield**..." Beloved, Satan's fiery darts will penetrate our puny faith every time. But when you lift up the Lord God Almighty as your shield, Satan might as well be shooting a book match into the middle of Niagara Falls.

Allow me to remind you of some things about God this morning. Our great God created the universe out of nothing by the words of His mouth. Our great God sent a deluge for 40 days and nights that covered the whole earth. Our great God split open the Red Sea and caused His people to walk dry shod all the way through. Our great God caused the earth to cease its rotation for a whole day while Joshua and the army of God routed the Amorites. Our God runs the universe with such precision that we already know we'll see the next blue moon on July 31st 2015. And we can predict astronomical events years and years further advanced than that, all because of the great orderliness of God. Our great God clothed Himself in human flesh and was born in a lowly manger. Our great God lived a sinless life in this sin-cursed earth, despite the infinite number of fiery darts that Satan hurled at Him for 33 years. Our great God is the One Who sees when the tiniest sparrow falls. Our great God and Savior Jesus Christ took upon Himself the sins of the entire world as He died on the cross, and fully satisfied the righteous wrath of God the Father toward those sins. And our Great God Jesus Christ burst forth from the grave three days after He died, and lives forever more! And beloved, our great God loves you, and He takes great delight in defeating Satan and all of his hellish hosts in your life when you lift Him up as your shield of faith.

So God Himself is our shield of faith; He is the one we lift up to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one. But the question remains, "How do I lift up Him up?" Well, let me answer that question by showing you how one man did it. You remember Abraham. We talked about his failure of faith earlier. But Abraham didn't let his failure destroy him. Abraham found out how to lift up the shield of faith and became the father of a great nation. And Paul writes about it in Romans 4.

Turn with me, please, to Romans 4:18. Paul says here that contrary to all hope, Abraham believed that he would become the father of many nations, and he did! Now the reason that he believed contrary to all hope was that at this time he was probably at least 80 and Sarah at least 70, and they are still childless (Genesis 15). When's the last time you heard of a 70 year old woman giving birth? I'd sure call that hopeless. But Abraham still believed that Sarah was going to have a baby! But notice the particulars of his belief beginning in verse 19. First of all, Abraham got his eyes off of himself and off of Sarah. He **did not consider** their utter inability to naturally conceive a child. Smart decision.

But notice what he **did consider** in verse 20 & 21. The first thing that Abraham considered was God's **promise**. God had told Abraham, "You and Sarah, in your old age, are going to have a son". And you see, the Bible tells us that Abraham was the friend of God (Isaiah 41:8). He and God were tight. Abraham knew God, and he was absolutely certain that he had heard God clearly.

But look at just why Abraham did not waiver at God's promise. First he considered God's **piety**. He knew that God did not make rash promises, that God was a Man of His Word. He said in Genesis 18:25, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And then Abraham considered God's **power**. Look at verse 21. Again, Abraham was the friend of God, and He knew God well enough to know that He was the omnipotent God and able to do whatever He promised to do. And look at the result of this faith in verse 23: "And therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness". God blessed him.

Here's how I believe that Abraham handled the devil's fiery darts. The devil would come to him from time to time and say, "Look at yourself, old man! And look at your old, worn out wife. Do you mean to tell me that the two of you are going to have a son? Give me a break, man. You're nothing but an old fool and you'll die an old fool". But even as the devil was spewing out his lies Abraham was grabbing hold of the shield of God. With one hand he took hold of the handle of God's promise, and with the other hand he took hold of the handle of God's piety and power, and he raised up the shield of God over him and cried out, "Be gone, Satan! Be gone, all you devils! Not one of your fiery darts will ever touch me! And beloved, I declare to this morning that God shows no partiality (Acts 10:34). And whoever will exercise the faith of Abraham can be certain to receive the blessings of Abraham.

So when the devil's darts are flying at you like machine gun fire, what do you do? First you get your eyes off your own weakness! Don't you dare look to your own intelligence, or your own determination, or your own faith, or your own anything. For as we've said before, you are no match for a supernatural devil anyway. He's the

mighty Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and you are Moses, rag-tag shepherd. He's Goliath the giant and you are David the teenage boy. He's the pope of Rome and you are Martin Luther. So get your eyes off yourself! Secondly, get your eyes on a promise of God. Go to His Word and ask Him to give you one, and I guarantee He will give it to you! He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). And thirdly, get your eyes on the almighty, infinite power of God. Remember the great deliverances He's given the saints of old. Remember the deliverances He's given you in the past. And know that He is the same yesterday, today, and forever!

Well, beloved, that is the story of the shield of faith. It is the greatest protection that any soldier of the cross can ever have. And actually, it is the only protection. But here's the deal. You can't raise up the shield of faith like Abraham did unless you know God like Abraham did.