

Well, good afternoon. It's good to be back again with you. As you can hear, I've picked up a little horsey again this week. And I'm feeling a little bit under the weather this morning, so that's why I didn't go out and do my meet and greet amongst you all. I didn't want to be the gift that keeps on giving or the angel of death walking through the nation of Israel. But we're back in our series of studies in spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6 this morning, and we come today to the shield of faith. We're back in order again after our hiccup a few weeks ago. Let me read to you the word of God, and before we do, let's pray. Sovereign and everlasting God, you who are our refuge, our strength, Our help in tight places, always close at hand. We pray this morning, Father, that you would come and strengthen your servant, that your strength, your grace would be made perfect in my weakness, and your word would spread rapidly through me, and the men and women gathered here today, oh Lord, would be strengthened with might in the inner man by your spirit, and given strength to wield the sword of the spirit. Offer these prayers, O Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen. Pick up in verse 10 and read down to verse 18. This is the word of God. Please take heed how you hear. Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 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 armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand firm, therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness and the 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 the saints. Amen. The grass withers and the flower falls off, but this is the word of God that endures forever. Well, being shot by an arrow is no fun. I say that not from personal experience, although I do remember as a child watching the cowboy and Indian, sorry, the cowboy and Native American Westerns in which the hero was invariably shot with an arrow and then you'd see him biting down on a stick as he pushed the arrow through the far side to get the barbed point out. But arrows by themselves are fairly thin. They make a fairly thin wound

channel, and the actual arrow itself blocks most of the flow of blood after you're penetrated, which is one of the reasons why you hunters use one of those expanding points to create a much more devastating wound panel. So if ever you find yourself shot by an arrow, my best advice is until you get to hospital, don't pull it out. Now, back in medieval times, Henry V, back then he was the Prince of Wales in 1408. He was involved in the Battle of Shrewsbury. You can learn all about this on YouTube. But he was shot in the face, just beneath his right eye, through his cheek by an arrow. And the arrow went straight in and lodged itself in his sinuses. And in those days, that would have been a mortal wound, not because it damaged his brain, but because when they tried to pull the arrow out, predictably, the metal point, which was a bullet point, stayed in the wound. And that would lead to infection, which would lead to death. And the surgeon on the battlefield, John Broadmoor, knew this. He took him back to one of the palaces, pulled the shaft of the arrow out, but it left the bullet point end stuck deep in the skull of the Prince of Wales. And so the skillful surgeon that he was, he packed the wound with a mixture of honey and elderberries and covered it in a poultice and sent the prince to an abbey to be sung psalms to by the monks. And for several days, he kind of thought, how can I fix this? And John Broadmoor designed what then became to be known as the Broadmoor Screw. It was a... a long metal pointed implement, and the end of it was like your fingers, it could open up, right? So it came to a point like an arrow, and you could push that into the track of the arrow, and then screw a true car into it, and the true car would expand, grip the arrow, and you could pull it out. None of which would be pleasant, of course, for the prince, back in the day, without anesthetics, but it's better than dying. And so he did that and got the arrow out after much poking and prodding. I'm glad it wasn't the Prince of Wales back in those days. And he then packed the wound with gauze, long, thin gauze, soaked in honey. And every two days he pulled the gauze out and replaced it and learnt actually by doing that that the wound healed from the inside out. So it didn't heal at the surface and form an abscess, but packing the wound and pulling out the gauze and then repacking the wound every 48 hours for six weeks. The wound healed all the way out. But it saved the Prince of Wales' life. John Broadmoor became the royal surgeon after that and lived for the rest of his days on a royal pension. And Henry V then, if you noticed, if you knew anything about medieval portraits, Henry V would never have his portrait taken face first. He was always to the side, showing his face, because he wanted to hide the collapsed bone in his cheek, which John Broadmoor was not able to save, or spare, or repair. Well all that's very interesting,

but it reminds us today of the great danger of arrows. We have the devil as our foe,

and he fires arrows, and they're doubly dangerous. They don't just penetrate us, but they also burn us. They're on fire, you might say, with the fire of hell itself. And Paul says that we have just the piece of armor to defend ourselves. He calls it the shield of faith.

Notice, it's useful in every circumstance, and it's useful against every satanic attack, in all circumstances. He says, verse 17, or verse, yeah, verse 17, no, verse 8, 16. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one. The devil cannot strike you with any of his arrows if you're carrying the shield of faith. And the Greek word for shield here is the Greek word for door, and You've all seen the pictures, I'm sure, of the Roman soldiers. Their shield was a scutum, it was called. It was 4 1/2 feet tall and 2

1/2 feet wide, made of laminated wood and linen and leather, and had metal boundaries around the side, and it would curl in so when you crouched behind it and you were having missiles fired at you, it would protect you from The front and also a little bit from the side weighed about 22 pounds, which is quite heavy, but it's worth it if it could protect you. And the Romans and the Greeks had learned the skill, of course, when you were in a phalanx, a group of soldiers, they would lock their shields together. and form what was called a testudo, or a tortoise, a shield that protected all the men from the front, on the top, and at the sides, and they could advance toward the enemy on the field of battle. And so Paul says, for you and for me as Christians, it's interesting that the shield is more effective in groups than by yourself, which is one of the reasons why being a member of the church is so important. The Christian life is not a solo sport. We live it best in community. And the devil loves to isolate

Christians from the pack and to single them off like the lions in the savannah in Africa. He looks for the weak and the sickly. Deer, or what do you call those springy things? I forget, my brain's diseased. Gazelles, thank you. Gazelles, he looks for the ones that are separated from the pack and he'll pick them off. preferentially. So it's important to be part of a robust Christian fellowship, and not just to be attending the church, that's important, but to be a member of the church. The New Testament doesn't know any Christian who's not a member of a local church. You have to know who the elders you are. When the Bible says, submit to your elders, and encourages the elders to shepherd the flock, the elders have to know who the sheep are they're shepherding, and the flock need to know who their elders are. And if you're disconnected from the flock, technically that's a command you can't obey because you don't have any elders to submit to. And there are no elders charged with your particular care and

your particular shepherding. So you might want to bear that in mind if you're a visitor here and have not yet committed to a church. We would love to have you. You can speak to one of the elders afterwards, probably not me, because I don't want to give you this. But we'd love to have you as a member here if you profess to know Christ and are baptized and are walking in fellowship with the Lord Jesus. Anyway, the shield in particular that will defend you is the shield of faith. And if you use this shield properly, you'll never need any other piece of armor. The arrow can't get to the breastplate of righteousness. It won't hit the helmet of salvation if you're crouched behind the shield of faith. It's the primary defensive weapon that God intends to protect you in all circumstances from every blazing arrow the devil might fire in your direction. What kind of blazing arrows does the devil use? And there's a list of them here.

I was thinking about it earlier on, but there's a list of them. He likes to fire fiery heresies, false doctrine, false doctrines, false ideas about God and the Christian life, how to get to heaven. These false ideas or imbalanced ideas, half-truths told as whole truths which become whole untruths, he loves to use these. And you'll see Paul speak about the satanic hand of the devil behind false teaching. In Ephesians 4, And 13, Paul exhorts, 14 actually, sorry, that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Now there's human cunning there, but most commentators see the cunning, craftiness, deceitful schemes. There's an infernal hand behind the false doctrines coming through men into the church. And Paul defines an immature Christian as a child who doesn't know what they are to believe about God, and therefore they're easy prey to be cast about on the winds of doctrine, different doctrines, confusing doctrines. And it's very important that you know You have a doctrinal stability that will defend you against false doctrine. In 1 Timothy 4 verse 1, Paul says, now the spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons or doctrines of demons. I think the New American Standard has it. So the devil is a theologian. He knows the truth, but he also knows how to twist the truth to unbalance Christians and to undermine our faith. In 2 Timothy 2, 24 to 26, Paul speaks of the need of false teachers to repent, leading to a knowledge of the truth that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will. So again these false teachers don't know the truth and they've been ensnared by the devil, duped by him and led off to him to cause damage wherever they go. So the first fiery dart is false

ideas about God, heresies. Half-truths told us whole truths. It's vital that you're in a church that stresses true theology, true doctrine, and that you're with other Christians who value that and are encouraging you to grow in that. Otherwise, you'll be wide open to the devil's deceitful, infernal arrows of fiery heresies. A second arrow the devil likes to use is fiery accusations. In the book of Revelation chapter 12 verse 10, the devil is called the accuser of the brethren. who accuses God's people day and night before our God. And that verse in chapter 12, verse 10, suggests the devil's been cast down from that lofty vantage point. He no longer has access, like in the days of Job, to the throne room of God, but he does have access to your heart, and he does have access to your conscience, and he'll come in and remind you of all of the things you've ever done, all of your sins. Heard a man say once, when my wife gets angry, she gets historical. I said, you mean hysterical? He said, no, historical. She reminds me of all the bad things I ever did. Zechariah three, verse one, then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right to accuse him, to accuse him. And sometimes he can also use other people to do that. He can use a wife or a husband to slander one another in their marriage to one another and to always be playing off one another's insecurities, which is a terrible thing that we should not do. We should be an agent of the Holy Spirit and not the unholy one. James says, the tongue is a fire, a very world of iniquity. The tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body and sets on fire the course of our life and is set on fire by hell. So fiery heresies, fiery accusations, fiery suggestions. suggestions were told in John 13 verse 2, during supper when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas, Simon's son, to betray Jesus. It's interesting in John 13, there's a progress. Later in the passage, Satan himself enters Judas' heart. When Judas crosses the line of fait accompli and decides, he's always been thinking about it, but then he embraces with the sop that Christ gave him, as Christ offers him one last opportunity of friendship, Satan, Judas embraces the sop. his commitment to betray Christ, and with that embrace, Satan enters him. But before Satan entered him, the thought entered him. Satan put the idea into Judas's heart. You see the same idea, you see the same concept with Ananias and Sapphira. You remember whenever they sold that piece of land and they got \$400,000 for it and rather than giving \$400,000 to the church, they gave \$350,000 and kept \$50,000 for themselves, which would have been fine. The problem was they told the church that they sold the property for \$350,000 and they were giving it all to the church. And Peter said, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit? Was Satan feeding Ananias and

Sapphira. Wouldn't it be wonderful if the church think you gave all the money to the church. They'd be so impressed with your generosity. Just keep back that little bit about the 50,000 that you keep for yourself. Which would have been fine, but it was their pride. And Satan stoked it by filling their minds with lies. Fiery suggestions. Fiery doubts. Another thing, you know, Satan

comes to Adam and Eve, has God said, you'll not surely die. God knows that in the day you eat of the tree, you'll become like him.

God wants to keep you down, hold you back, stop you from having your best life now. Fari doubts God has abandoned you. David, are you sure you've got

enough soldiers at the moment? Your army's a bit small, maybe.

You're having a recruitment problem in Israel. Why don't you number your army to make sure you've got enough soldiers? And the

devil incited David, it says in 2 Chronicles, to number the army by persuading David to believe the lie that his strength was found in the number of his soldiers and not in the presence of his

God. But it was Satan put the idea, the doubt, into David's mind. Fiery distractions. Peter comes

to Jesus and says, You don't want to go to the cross, that's a bad idea. I've got a better idea. And Jesus said to Peter,

get thee behind me, Satan. Not because Peter had been possessed, but he had the ideas put into his mind that Satan used to try

and distract Christ from his calling. Fiery lusts. Remember in Romans 1 26, Paul says, for this reason God gave them up to vile passions for

even their woman, leaving the natural use burned in their lust for one another. They burned in their lusts, their

kind of lusts, when these strong desires for what God has forbidden, are on fire, as it were, with the fires of hell, and we need

to learn to identify the lusts that would pull us away from God. They come with lies, like the lie of FOMO, F-O-M-O, the

fear of missing out. You owe it to yourself to enjoy this. Everybody else is doing it. How

many of our college students hear the lie? All of your friends are sleeping around, and it'd be fun, wouldn't it? You don't

want to miss out. fiery bitterness, fiery bitterness. Paul says in Ephesians 4, be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down in

your anger and give no opportunity. The word opportunity, topos, is used to describe a wrestling hold, a favorable wrestling hold,

a place of advantage. Don't let the sun go down on your anger. You've had a blazing row with

your wife or with your husband, and you're trying to sort it out, you think, I'm tired, I'm gonna go to bed. And when you

go to bed, you let the anger settle in and the bitterness settle in. And you give the devil an opportunity. There's a wonderful quote I was

looking at this morning in C.S. Lewis's Screwtape Letters, where the devil, the devils are talking, remember how to tempt this couple. And Screwtape writes to his nephew,

Screwtape's the senior devil. In civilized life, he says, domestic

hatred usually expresses itself by saying things which would appear quite harmless on paper. The words themselves are not offensive. but to say them in such a voice or at such a moment that they are not far short of a blow to the face. To keep this game up, you and Glubos, another demon, must see to it that each of these two fools has a sort of double standard. Your patient must demand that all his own utterances are to be taken at their face value and judged simply on the actual words, while at the same time judging all his wife's utterances with the fullest and most over-sensitive interpretation. of tone and the context and what he knows she's really trying to do. She must be encouraged to do the same to him. Hence, from every quarrel, they can both go away convinced or very nearly convinced that they're both quite innocent. You know the kind of thing. I simply ask her what time dinner will be and she flies into a temper. Once this habit, this is genius, Once this habit is well established, you have the delightful situation of a human saying things with the express purpose of offending, and yet having a grievance when offense is taken. You try to offend your wife, and then when she's offended, you're grieved. You're being too sensitive. But you deliberately tried to offend her. And when she's offended and you're surprised, no you're not, because you meant to offend her. And then you have the gall to feign offense when she takes offense. And the devil's fingerprints are all over that situation. And he wants you to be bitter, which is the poison you drink hoping other people die. How does faith form a shield against these fiery arrows. First of all, faith has unique power to see through the appearance of things and lay hold of reality. Faith has the unique power to lay hold of the person of God, and the promises of God, and the precepts of God, and the providence of God. No time to go into that right now. But you know the kind of thing, and this happens all the time, right? Somebody offends you, they let you down in some way, and you're with your friends, and you feel the need to assassinate the other person's character. Purely for prayer, of course. And you gotta ask yourself in those moments, I'm just sharing the burden. No, you're not, you're stabbing someone in the back. We've all done it, I've done it, you've done it. Probably this very week. I want them to pray for me, the situation I'm in. No, no, I'm really trying to stab my brother and my sister in the back. I want to hurt them because they've hurt me. And faith has the unique ability in such moments to ask, what does God say about this? What is my duty? How does love your neighbor as you love yourself play into this very moment? And the problem you and I have is, and we'll end here this morning, is that you and I are so good at sinning, it happens so fast, we can't stop it. The words have

left our mouth before we even knew where they came from. And so it's really important, just like in military, to have an after-action report. You know, after, in military, when you're in a battle, a skirmish after you've been ambushed and you survived and you come away with your men and you gather round and you think, how did we do then? Did we follow our training? Did we do our duty? What could we have done better? And so it's very, very important at the end of at least each day is to go back and think, how did things go today? Maybe you blew your top. Okay, well ask yourself, slow it down, what happened? What did they say or do that made me get so angry? When they did that, what thoughts went through my mind? What conclusions did I come to? I knew what they were really trying to say. No, I didn't, because I can't know their heart, only God knows their heart. What conclusions did I come to? How did those conclusions make me feel? What emotions went through my heart and my mind? Slow it down, spread it out, get into the grubby, grimy mess of it. What was I trying to achieve when I said that to my wife or to my husband? Be brutally honest with yourself. And then what did I do? How did I respond? And then you go back and you say, well, what should I have thought at that time? What conclusion should I have come to? Maybe you're having a blazing row with your husband. And as is often the case in the middle of the argument, one of you will offer an olive branch. But often the person offering the olive branch is the most guilty party. They've hurt you more than you've hurt them. And you think, I'm not gonna take that olive branch. I want my pound of flesh first. And so the argument continues. And then after you think to yourself, this is getting out of hand, you offer an olive branch, your partner says, I'm not taking the olive branch because you didn't take mine. And off the argument goes again and again and again and again. And those moments when you're doing your after action report, you remind yourself, hold on a second, I need to make the habit of never rejecting an olive branch because blessed are the peacemakers for they should be called sons of God. And you'll not think that at the time, but if you do a regular spiritual after action report, those are the kind of thoughts that will come into you and you'll learn to live a way you've never lived before. And you'll learn to speak a way you've never spoken before by learning to think a way you've never thought before. Lou Priolo's got a great thing called The Heart Journal. If you Google it, I'm sure it'll come up somewhere. He was a New Thetic counselor. It's exactly that kind of a thing, working through what happened, what was I thinking, feeling, wanting, and how did I respond, and then how ought to I have thought, and how ought to I have felt, and what ought to I have been desiring, and how should

I have responded. And that's the way we grow as Christians. And of course, in those spiritual after action reports, we'll often have much reason to be discouraged by our sin. And the devil will wanna come in and make you feel you've messed it all up again. And that's the time when the shield of faith comes out. And you go back to Christ, who sits on a throne where grace and mercy reign. And you come back to him and you say, Lord Jesus, forgive me, I've messed it up again. My conscience is defiled. Sprinkle me with clean water and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. And Christ will cover you as a hen covers her chicks with the shadow of his wings and the perfection of his righteousness and the power of his blood. and you'll be clean again and secure again in that moment. Because now what happened in Zechariah Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, the Lord rebuke you, Satan. The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this man, as it were, a brand plucked from the fire? Now Joshua was standing before the angel clothed with filthy garments. And the angel said to those who were standing before him, remove the filthy garments from him. And to him he said, behold, I have taken away your iniquity, and I will clothe you with pure vestments. And that's where we always go with the shield of faith. That is most peculiar power, the ability to bring us right into the throne room of heaven where Christ is and the altar is and the blood is that speaks a better voice than the voice of Abel. Abel's blood cried out for judgment, but the blood of Christ cries out with an omnipotent voice for mercy. Mercy free, mercy full, mercy final, and mercy forever. So take the shield of faith, my brother, my sister, that you might stand against the fiery darts, all the fiery darts. You have a weapon in the panoply that none of Satan's darts can get past, faith. And you strengthen your faith with the word of Christ. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Get as much as this book into your heart as you can, and it'll strengthen your capacity to hold the shield of faith. when the darkness comes in like a flood. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for my brothers and sisters today. Father, thank you for hearing our prayer, for not letting the weakness of my body and the cloudiness of my mind get betwixt and between the power of your message. Pray, Father, you'll help me, help the brethren here. We've all sinned and fallen much this week, oh God, and we need your grace to strengthen us against the fiery darts of the evil one. Our faith is weak, oh Lord Jesus. We believe, help thy our unbelief. In Christ, amen.