

Sept 5th 2010 Armour Series: Shield of Faith: Heb 11:1-3,32-12:3
The Shield That's Guaranteed

The Roman Shield:

It was by far the biggest item of armour that the Roman soldier took into battle, and when it came to defending one's self against the projectiles that were fired or hurled at you, it was the most effective.

The Romans gave this shield a special name. In Latin it was scutum; in Greek it was θυρεος(thureos). When you used this word everyone knew that you meant the big daddy of shields. Not the small round one but this door like structure that was so effective against the attacks of the enemy.

When Paul was listing the believer's spiritual armour, and wanted to describe the power that faith had against the enemy of souls, he used θυρεος—the only time this word is used in the NT—and his readers knew that faith was a huge part of the armour that God had given them.

Historians inform us that this Roman shield was about 1200 centimetres high and some 600 centimetres wide. It was slightly curved and designed in such a way that it would lock into the shields of your fellow soldiers to make a moveable wall. Made of a laminate of three layers of wood strips that were then covered in leather, it was light enough to carry yet strong enough to protect from arrows and spears. Before going into battle these shields were dipped into water as a further protection against the fiery arrows they could expect to encounter.

Is it any wonder that when Paul equates faith to such a piece of equipment he says in Ephesians 6:16:

¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Or as the Revised Standard Version puts it:

Above all taking the shield of faith

This is such a vital part of the armour God supplies that Paul places extra emphasis on us taking it and using it.

So what is this faith that makes such a good shield?

Hebrews 11:1 gives us the Biblical definition

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Pastor Lee Roberson in a sermon on faith said that:-

“Faith is belief and trust. It is believing God and trusting God. Both elements must be present to make faith”

He then went on to tell of a poor woman who was asked by her minister “what is faith?”, who answered, “I’m unlearned and cannot answer well, but I think it’s taking God at His Word.”

That’s exactly what faith is. Believing that all God has done for me, and all the promises He has given me, and all the things He has planned for me, are true. Faith is putting my life on the line for Him on the basis of His promise to save me, keep me, use me, protect me, and one day welcome me into His eternal glory.

The truly wonderful thing is that every believer has been given this faith by God Himself. He has planted it in our heart as a seed. As Paul had already mentioned in Ephesians 2:8-9.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

The ability to believe in the amazing truth about Jesus being God the Son and how His life, death, and resurrection, has the power to transform us into God’s righteous children, has been given us by God.

We used that gift when we first believed. Now we need to encourage our faith to grow by the hearing of God’s Word and the delighting in the fellowship of the Spirit and with other believers.

It is not so much the cultivating of our faith, however, that Paul is making reference to here, but the need for us to recognize that it is a shield for us to use.

In fact, Paul says it is a shield that comes with a guarantee, and it’s not one of those guarantees that has a restricted period of time which has always run out when you need it. This shield is guaranteed to be effective against all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (Ephesians 6:16)

¹⁶*In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish **all** the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

We are all familiar with the flaming attacks of the evil ones. We know that they are on the way when we get this fearful feeling in our hearts. They are the things, the words, the thoughts, that cause us to question God.

Question His promises to us. Question His love for us. Question His power to save and keep us. Question God's very existence.

The devil attacks us through our weaknesses and tells us that God will now desert us. That He won't keep on forgiving us or rescuing us.

He attacks when we go through trying circumstances. When death, or sickness, or financial ruin, or relationship breakdown evades our secure little world, and he whispers, God doesn't care for you or this would never have happened. If He truly loves you why is He letting you or your loved ones go through so much. If He is really there why hasn't He answered your prayer. Hasn't He promised to make life easy for you.

To raise the shield of faith is to confront those lies with your belief in God's faithfulness. To remind yourself of those Scriptures that confirm the fact that God's love for you is unconditional, and that He will never leave you or forsake you.

And especially to understand that faith doesn't shield us from physical suffering, loss of earthly possessions, hardship or grief. Faith enables us to endure such things in the understanding that God will bring us through them and His constant love will never be taken from us despite all else we may suffer.

That list of faith heroes that we read about in Hebrews chapter 11 is proof positive of this. The fact that they lived by faith did not mean that they had no problems, but that such problems were part of a journey which ended in a glorious and wonderful way because they lived by faith.

This is particularly the case of those predominantly anonymous believers listed in the last verses of chapter 11. Consider v36-37

³⁶Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. ³⁷They were stoned^[a]; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—

Their faith did not protect them from such but it gave them the power to continue and not be defeated. They stood firm for God and their reward awaits them.

Now such an immense battle is not faced by all believers, but the fact is that the shield of faith that brought them through such dreadful experiences is obviously able to sustain us through whatever comes our way.

It must be utilized to be effective however. Paul says take up the shield of faith. Not just take it, but take it up. The NLT says:-

¹⁶ In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil.

I came across these lyrics from a song by Alison Krauss that makes this point:-

Sometimes I'm battle weary
I forget to use my shield
The arrows pierce my armor
And I stumble in the field

A shield won't do much good if it's hangin' by your side
Keep the shield of faith before you if you want to stay alive

I'll think my life is over
But the Lord he comes to me
He heals my wounded spirit
And he sets me on my feet

A shield won't do much good if it's hangin' by your side
Keep the shield of faith before you if you want to stay alive

Sometimes your battle weary
But the war's already won
Keep your head and hold your shield high
'Til your days of life are done

A shield won't do much good if it's hangin' by your side
Keep the shield of faith before you if you want to stay alive

Keep the shield of faith before you if you want to stay alive

Keeping this shield of faith before us is very much a heart and mind thing. It's setting our thoughts on the truth we believe and constantly reminding ourselves of what we know to be true.

The other day I was sitting with a man whose wife had just died and getting from him some details of the funeral which I was to take. As I talked about the ceremony he said quite openly, "Well I'm not a believer and I'm anti-religion. I'm an atheist because I can't believe in a God who would allow such terrible things to happen in the world as are constantly going on." Now I knew that I could answer such a statement, I had no worries about that. But I sensed in my heart an immediate pang of fear for it was an attack from the evil one. But just as immediate was my trust in the shield of faith, as in my heart I was reiterating that the God I trusted in did indeed exist, and was powerful against any lie of the evil one. Now that wasn't the time to defend God, and God didn't require my defence of Him then, but I was able to share with him my understanding of where he was coming from and to gently remind him that such did not change the reality of one who created the world. And later when I talked of how I would be making sure that God was part of the service and how I would be reading Psalm 23, he surprised me by quoting accurately from that Psalm.

The initial fear was there, but the shield of faith was my confidence in God's control of that situation, and He proved that He is worthy of that faith.

But before we leave this subject of the shield of faith there is one last thing we can learn about it from the Roman's use of their shield. For there were times when for their own safety they had to link their shields together.

One writer talks about this united use of the shield in the following way:-

One of the aspects of the Roman shields was their use in a combination which was called the testudo ("tortoise") formation. Twenty-seven soldiers would combine together: six in front and seven in each of three rows.

The ones on the outside edge would interlock their shields vertically; the insiders would form a roof with theirs. The composite was virtually impregnable as a sort of walking tank. They would test their skills in training by driving chariots over it .

Talking about our relying on the shield of faith is easier for some than for others. There will always be times when the individual struggles to do so effectively on their own. The battle they face is an extreme one and though

they want to hold up the shield of faith they find it so difficult to do it alone. That's when others in the body of Christ need to be there with them. As we stand alongside them we lift our shield of faith and join it with theirs. Many are the times when I have sat with one who is in the midst of a raging battle. I think of some who were seeking to bear a great grief or were facing a severe sickness. And they have said to me, "Pastor, I don't think I have the faith to go on. I'm not sure that God is still there for me." And I have said to them, "I know He is there for you. That is the essence of my faith. And I will join my faith with yours and together we will trust God to bring you through. To protect and keep you."

This needs to happen more and more in our community of faith. Through home groups, and particularly through individual believers being aware of those who are struggling, and coming alongside them and joining their shield of faith with theirs.

We all need to take up our shield of faith continuously and I trust that you will go from here today desiring to do so more and more. But I also trust that you will courageously ask God to lead you to someone who you can stand alongside in their battle; whose faith you can strengthen as together you hold up the shields of faith that are guaranteed to quench the darts of the evil one.

