

And then here's our verse this evening. In all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts or arrows of the evil one.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for this truth you've given us each week to give us security, to give us confidence in our faith. We pray tonight that you would come and speak to us with this piece of armor.

[4 : 00] And Lord, I pray that we put it on. And Lord, we are secure and strong in the Lord. And we pray it in Jesus' name and God's people said, amen. Amen.

You can be seated. It's a day that still haunts Noelle Bonmiller. It was early August. She'd agreed to take another shift for one of her fellow firefighters.

And by all appearances, it appeared as though it would be a routine day. The beautiful skies, the birds singing through the forest trees, and the breathtaking view.

These were all the things Noelle loved about being a firefighter in the forest. But a few hours into her shift, her radio went off with the sound of urgent voices.

A fire blew up. A fire blew up, the voices screamed. A fire had blown up and was quickly spreading. It was what's known as a crown fire.

[5 : 04] You see, unlike fires that stay on the surface, a crown fire gets up into the top of the trees. And it is the most feared and volatile wildfire possible.

Flames were shooting up as high as 250 feet, equal to that of a 23-story building. And it was moving at an astonishing pace.

Noelle watched helplessly as the fire spread out of control. And then something happened that gave her a very eerie feeling. Noelle noticed that the wind had shifted.

That mixed with the reports on the radio, Noelle soon realized that her and her two fellow firefighters were now in the direct path of the fire.

She raced back to her fellow firefighters, but by this time, they only had one option left to be able to survive. The three of them hunkered down in their fire engine in hopes that that fire engine would protect them from the coming burning flames.

[6 : 20] Here's what Noelle said of that day, and I quote, I laid in the back of that engine, and all I could see were images of fire running through my head.

I could hear the fire just outside. Now, they say it sounds like a freight train, and it does.

It was so loud. And I kept thinking of all my friends who were trapped, and how would we all survive?

4 a.m. the next day, Noelle finally climbs out of that fire engine. The paint bubbled and blistered from the intensity of the heat.

But listen, because of the refuge of that fire truck, Noelle and her fellow firefighters survived. She's never forgotten that day.

[7 : 28] Now, some years later, in reflecting on that event, here's what she said. Quote, listen to these words. Faith and Emily, let me ask you tonight, Have you ever been through the fire?

Have you ever known the burning flames of personal loss? Have you experienced the intense heat of financial uncertainty? Have you experienced the third degree burns of brokenness?

Listen, as the pastor of this church, I know so many stories of people of this faith family, and I know that there are some of you who are dealing with the remaining embers, or the ashes of adversity.

You're still dealing with those remaining embers of loss and grief. I know that on certain days, when the wind is just right, some of you can still smell the smoke of past pain.

Amen? Many of us, in one way or another, at some point in life, like Noelle, have had to go through the fire. And the question for us is this, how do we as Christians survive?

[8 : 58] How do we as Christians stand firm when the fires of life seem to be burning out of control? And that's exactly what Paul addresses next in this next piece of armor.

Look at it again in verse 16. Paul says, In all circumstances, take up the what? The shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts.

Darts is kind of a bad... We're not talking about that kind of darts, all right? These are arrows. The flaming arrows of the evil one. And so the very next piece of armor that Paul deals with is the shield of faith.

Now, as we've done with every single piece of armor, we're going to talk first about its significance. What was so important about the shield as it relates to the Roman soldier?

Because that's who Paul has in mind when he's giving these illustrations. It's the armor of a Roman soldier. So what role did the shield play for a soldier?

[10:05] Now, there were actually a couple of different types of shields for a Roman soldier. The first was like a small shield. This was used in kind of hand-to-hand combat.

Think about like in the movie *Gladiator*. This would have been a very mobile shield, small. You could run with it. You could keep it with you all the time. And it was used, again, for active battle. But that's not the shield that Paul has in mind here. It's not what he's referring to. He's referring to this type of shield. This shield was about half the size or more of the soldier himself. And it was almost like that of a door that you could hide behind. This is the shield that Paul's talking about. And it was used, listen, for a very specific part of the battle.

Now, how do I know, on what basis do I know that this is the shield that Paul is talking about? Because look at verse 16 again. Verse 16 says that in all circumstances, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the what?

[11:12] The flaming arrows, the flaming darts. So we know it's this shield because if you've got flaming arrows coming at you, you don't want that small shield, amen?

Because you're too vulnerable. If you only have that small shield, so much your body is still exposed when those flaming arrows are coming. And not only that, but when an army was about to overtake a city, you've probably seen this like in movies, they will come up to the wall or they'll come up to the edge of the city.

And what do the people above do? They start throwing things down. Usually they'll throw flaming objects down upon you in hopes to get you to retreat.

Get away! I couldn't resist. That's like the third Monty Python reference in three weeks.

All right, so yeah, they want you to run away. They want you to retreat. And so they're literally throwing these fire objects down on you. Now listen, listen. This is what an army would do.

[12:20] Somebody say, preach, preacher. Are you ready? Are you ready? This is what an army would do. And tell me it's not a metaphor of what a church ought to do.

What the army would do is they would huddle together and they would form a barrier of protection against these flaming arrows.

That is, together with their shields up, they would make this fortress that would protect them from all the fiery objects.

Isn't that a beautiful picture of how the church ought to be united? Amen? This is not just me and my shield. This is us and our shields together being protected from the evil one.

So this shield was used for particular purposes in the battle, namely right up at a city wall or when the enemy was firing these flaming arrows.

[13:24] Now, what is the spiritual significance of the shield? Well, to understand that, we need to know what is meant by these fiery arrows. Now, once again, and again, I'm trying to be sensitive to this, but as I read different things and you've heard people teach on this, people just have all these different guesses.

I'm trying my best. I'm not suggesting I can't get it wrong. I'm trying my best to not guess. Like, I'm asking, like, with everything I understand about the Bible, how can we best understand what this is, not what some teacher thinks it is?

Amen? I mean, Martin Luther said the flaming arrows were the doubts of a Christian. He thought that was the case. Why? As I referenced this last week, Martin Luther doubted a lot in his Christian struggle.

Others that I've heard talk about this will say that the flaming arrows are the temptations that we face. But I don't think we have to guess what these fiery arrows are because what is fire a frequent metaphor of in Scripture?

I'm glad you asked that question. 1 Peter 1, verse 6. Here it is. Come on. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith, that's what we're talking about in Ephesians 6, the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes though it's tested by fire.

[15:06] Now connect all that. Trials, faith, and fire. All of that's connected in Ephesians 6. Does everybody see that? Say yes. Later on in 1 Peter, in chapter 4, in verse 12, he says this.

Beloved, don't be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though you're experiencing something strange.

Instead, rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings. So here it is. Fiery trial and sufferings. That you also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.

And later on in verse 19, therefore let those who suffer according to God's will in trust, that is have faith, their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

And then Isaiah, who is like Paul's favorite Old Testament author, Isaiah 48 verse 10 says, Behold, I have refined you but not as silver. I have tried you in the, say it, furnace of affliction.

[16:16] The fires of affliction. So we don't have to guess what these arrows are. What are they? They're the sufferings and trials of life.

Anybody ever had a few of those? Anybody had a few of those shot at you? Repeatedly? Yes!

We've gone through suffering. We know the trials of life.

We've experienced, like Noel, the fires of life. That's what these arrows are. And listen, dear friends, I say this to encourage you.

These trials, or arrows, are not if, they're when. They are a part of the Christian life.

Philippians 1.29, It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ, you should not only believe in Him, but also, say it, suffer for His sake.

[17:15] Acts 14.22, That through many, say it, tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.

And then in 2 Timothy 3.12, Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Christian, good news tonight, you are going to suffer.

Aren't you glad you came to church? You just are. And you don't need me to tell you that. You know that. And I'm going to go off on a little soapbox here, and I'm probably going to get in trouble for it, but I don't care.

I've had so many, and these are people that I love, and I'm not going to name names of a particular theological persuasion, starts with a D, and they will say things, and it just makes my skin crawl.

Well, God would never allow His people to go through tribulation. That is biblical baloney. First of all, people that talk about a seven-year tribulation, find me the verse.

[18:22] Good luck with that. There isn't one on a seven-year tribulation. I don't know how people have been duped by that belief. It's not in the Bible.

Jesus says, in this world, you will have tribulations. Have you studied church history? Do you know what the early church went through when people were having their heads chopped off?

Yeah, but it's going to get a lot worse. Well, it may get a lot worse, but I'm pretty sure having your head chopped off is a bit painful. Do you know what Christians are going through in much of the world today?

That most Christians in the Sudan don't even live to age 20? Stop with this nonsense that God won't let His people go through suffering.

Faith family, listen. We are followers followers of a crucified man. What part of taking up your cross and following Him sounds pleasant?

[19:24] Alright, I'm alright. I'm okay. I'm okay. I got that out. I'm just like, we have... It's American Christianity that's the problem. Because we have lost the biblical doctrine of suffering.

In this world, you will have tribulation. Through many tribulations, you will enter into the kingdom of God. Listen, listen.

If you are joining the battle, you'd better expect some arrows. Like, we're so shocked when the enemy fights back.

And we shouldn't be. Now listen, I don't have the time to unpack the role of suffering in a believer's life. I've done that in other sermons. I'll give you just very quickly three biblical principles and I'll do it fast.

As to the role that fire, these fiery trials, play in the life of a believer. Number one, is fire reveals what is true. Fire reveals what is true.

[20:25] Scripture talks about this. We read a few verses earlier on this. About the testing of our faith through fire. Right? True metal endures the fire.

And faith, listen, faith is the precious metal of the Christian life. Amen? You might want to write that down. Faith is the precious metal of the Christian life and that metal gets tested over and over and over again to make sure it's true.

Amen? Okay, I've lost three of you, but that's okay. Alright, so. Secondly, fire removes what's fake. It removes what's fake. Not only does it test our faith, but it removes the impurities.

Right? Think about this imagery of how fire purifies our hearts. It removes the idols. It removes those things that cling to our hearts that are not of God.

It molds us into His image. And then thirdly, fire restores what's good. Do you realize that every metaphor for suffering in Scripture has as its goal the good of the person?

[21 : 33] I'll give you just a few of them. The pruning of the branch is for the good of the branch so that it will grow more. If you're a gardener, you know that. You've got to prune the branch for the branch to grow.

Or the training of an athlete. Or the disciplining a child. All of these illustrations are painful. They include suffering, but they are ultimately for our good.

And this is why we have to reclaim a doctrine of suffering. Amen? This idea that God would never let His children go through pain is just anti-Bible.

It just is. This has a good purpose in our life. Now, as it relates to the fiery trials of the battlefield of faith, let me give you just two quick implications and we'll move on.

I think this is going to be helpful for some of you based in light of what I said. If you're still with me, say yes. You having as much fun as I am? All right, here we go. Here it is. You're not a target until you enlist.

[22 : 39] You're not a target until you enlist. Now, don't misunderstand me. Lots of people go through trials, both believer and unbeliever, but listen in closely to what I'm saying. Only a believer faces the fiery trials of evil spiritual forces.

Right? Only a believer faces those types of fiery trials. I say this because do you know how many conversations I've had as a pastor with brand new Christians and they say something like this. You've heard this before as well. They say, listen, listen, I became a Christian and I thought my life was going to get easier. And I'm like, well, it's only going to get harder, right?

Because you've just enlisted, my friend. There's a target on your back now. And no, life does not necessarily get easier. Oh, life gets more peaceful because we have peace with God and therefore the peace of God.

But in terms of the circumstances of life, there is no guarantee it will get easier. In fact, it may very well get more difficult because the evil spiritual forces now see you as a threat.

[23 : 49] To which some of you would say, well, then why join the army? To which my response would be, because I'd rather have eternal victory in God than temporary comfort. temporary comfort.

Like, I don't know, like, I'm from Tennessee and I don't fully always understand everything. I'd take a little bit of fire now to get eternity and even have God in that and have eternity with God than to not have God now and eternal fire.

So, so you enlist because you love God and because you love God both in this life and the next. You, you have eternal victory victory in Jesus.

That's why you enlist, brother. So listen, you're not a target until you enlist and some of you disillusioned Christians need to understand that.

No, life hasn't gotten easier and Jesus doesn't promise that until all things are restored. All right? Now, the next thing is this. Not only that, but those on the front lines face the most fire.

[24 : 53] If you're in the back of the pack, you probably won't take a lot of arrows. I've seen this too. It's not only the person that becomes a Christian, it's the person that's been a Christian for a while and then they go through an awakening, they go through a time of renewal and they're like, I'm going to increase my commitment, I'm going to get involved in church, maybe I'm going to get involved in ministry leadership and life gets harder and they think, why?

And the answer is because people on the front lines are more of a threat. Listen, what was the, somebody say preach preacher, come on, come on, come on. What was the very first thing Jesus experienced after his baptism, which was his public entrance into ministry?

He goes into the wilderness and he gets attacked by the evil one. He's coming off the highest experience of his life thus far and immediately spiritual warfare.

This is the reality of ministry leadership. It is waged on the front lines. It is why so many pastors quit. It's why I've seen many Christians quit.

And do you know what they say? Come on, listen, listen. If you've zoned out, what do you do? Zone back in. Have you ever listened to the language they use? They'll say, I quit because I got burned.

[26 : 20] I got burned. The fiery trials became too much. Listen, if fire is a guarantee and fire is for our good and it's a part of the ground war, then how do we not quit?

What gets us through the fire? Verse 16. Here it is again. In all circumstances take up the, say it, shield of faith.

And why do you take up the shield of faith? Because with that, you can extinguish the fire, the flaming arrows of the evil one.

In other words, here it is. This is very simple. Faith gets us through the fire. Amen? Faith gets us through the fire. Like Noel.

Like Noel taking refuge in that fire engine. Faith is our refuge. Faith is what protects us from the fire. It doesn't mean we don't face the fire.

[27 : 26] It gets us through it. And you say, well, what is faith? Well, of course, it's trusting God in a simplistic form. But listen, I think faith in times of suffering also includes this.

For this light, momentary affliction, and of course, listen, listen, I realize when you're going through the fire, it feels anything but light and momentary.

Amen? It feels heavy and forever. But Paul is comparing the light, momentary afflictions of this life to the what? The eternal weight of glory that your mind can't even comprehend.

And so what do we do? We look not to the things that are seen, the fire. We look to the things that are unseen, the glory. You with me?

I'm not looking at the fire. I'm looking at the glory. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

[28 : 31] eternal. That is, the shield of faith is looking to God and His promises and trusting Him and not the trial. You see?

Are you with me? I'm looking to that which I can't see, which is what? Faith. It's faith. It's trusting in the glory of God rather than the sufferings of life.

Notice this on the screen. That faith sees beyond the fire to a heavenly Father. That's what faith is doing in the trial. Yeah, it's trusting God, but it's the ability to have eyes to see beyond the fire to a heavenly Father.

That's what the shield of faith is. And that is why we walk by faith and not by sight. And the shield of faith allows us, I say us, because it's not just a me, us, to persevere the fire together.

Because remember, this is written to a church. There's not like a dude named Ephesus who's getting this letter. Okay? It's the Ephesians. The fire is coming at y'all and faith will get you through.

[29 : 50] Faith will get you through. Do you remember the story? I shared it quite some time ago, but I know some of you remember it because some of you quoted it back to me. The difference between buffalo and cows in the storm, do y'all remember this?

What happens is when a storm comes, cows see the storm coming and they run. And of course, cows aren't incredibly fast. And the storm eventually catches them and they're running with the storm, which makes them have to go through the storm longer.

A buffalo, however, runs into the storm. And they endure it. They get through it quicker because they're not retreating. They're not running in fear.

Listen, that's what faith allows us to do. Faith allows you to be a buffalo, not a cow. Essentially. If you're taking notes, write that down. Pastor said, faith lets me be a buffalo, not a cow.

Tweet. Right? So you can post that later. But no, it allows us to run into the storm because I've got faith. I'm confident in God.

[30 : 58] Now, I think this helps us see the order of the armor. Do you remember the second week I told you the order of these things matter? And I'm trying to each week show you how one builds on the other.

So let's do that now. So we can, do y'all like kind of putting this stuff together? I do. It just helps me make, make it a lot more sense to me. So here's the way it goes. When I'm clear on the gospel, that is the belt of truth, I know who Jesus is.

He lived the perfect life. He died for my sins. He rose on the third day. He ascended. He's seated by the right hand of the Father, interceding for me as my great high priest. I know who Jesus is and I know what he's done.

I know what the gospel is. When that's tight, my breastplate is secure. My heart's protected. I know who I am. I know what my identity is.

I'm not going to listen to the lie of the evil one that what I do is who I am. No, who I am is the very righteousness of Jesus that was given to me by faith.

[31 : 58] Belt is tight. Breastplate is then secure, which gives me what? Confidence. Secure feet. I've got confidence now. Do you know why I have confidence?

Do you know why I have security? Because I've got peace with God. No matter whether it's life or death or angels or principalities, nothing is ever going to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

I am standing strong. Belt tight. Breastplate secure. Feet strong. So that, listen, when, not if, when the suffering comes my way, I can trust God and march on.

I can move forward in faith with the shield of faith. Why? Because I know who Jesus is. I know who I am.

I've got total security in God and peace with Him. So no matter what comes my way, I'm raising my shield. So that's how all that fits together.

[33 : 16] This is how the believer is equipped. Isn't that helpful? Am I the only one that's like, it's so helpful to see these things, how they work together. Like, God really is putting together here a soldier that is equipped and armed for the battle.

So here's my next question. What do you think evil spiritual powers are going to come after? What are they going to go after? They want you to lower your shield. They're going to come after your feet and they're going to try to get you to lower your shield.

And I've been telling you, you'll probably get tired of me saying this, but I'm going to keep saying it. It's my biggest beef on how most people approach Ephesians 6 is they take it outside of Ephesians.

And I'm just telling you, again, this is at the end of a letter, and so it fits with the letter. It's not an add-on at the end. And so I'm asking these kinds of questions as I study and prepare.

I'm asking, okay, is there anything that Paul has already said in Ephesians that would help me understand how these evil spiritual powers are going to come after my shield?

[34 : 17] They want to take my shield away. They want me to lower my shield. So what might they do to get at my faith? You with me? You understand the question? You want to connect some dots?

Look at Ephesians 3. Ephesians 3. Here we go. I wish I was like a weatherman and I could, you know, draw things or whatever on the screen. So here we go. So that through the, say it, church, so believers, the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

Now what does that connect us to? Ephesians 6. Right? The rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. It's an exact quote in Ephesians 6. Okay? This according to the eternal purpose that is realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with...

Come on now. Well, you know how to interpret that. Let me interpret it for you. In whom we have secure feet. The shoes of the armor, the shoes of Ephesians 6 is what?

It's boldness and confidence. Okay? Through our shield.

[35 : 39] Are you reading this with different eyes? I think I'm double excited for you. All right? Like, come alive. There they are. There's the shoes. And the confidence comes through the shield, the faith in Him.

So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am... Fire.

Fire. Trials. Do you see all the dots? They're like jumping off the page. It's boldness and confidence. The shoes.

It's the faith. The shield. And it's the do not lose heart in the trials, in the suffering. So, here it is.

Here it is. Listen, listen.

How do evil spiritual forces try to lower your shield? And this stuff has been so practical. It's not like glowing eyes and a demon shows up.

[36 : 39] Here's the way it works. Evil spiritual powers try to achieve defeat through discouragement. I'll make them lose heart.

I'll get them discouraged by all the fire. Because the moment they get discouraged, they will drop that shield.

Isn't this practical? I mean, as we've gone through each piece of armor, I've tried to show you how the evil spiritual powers do this.

I'm trying to alert you to their schemes, Ephesians 6 says. And as I say repeatedly, it isn't beware in case a dragon shows up on your doorstep, you know, trying to sell you a vacuum cleaner.

You have not gone through the cross of Christ. And all of it was because you're loved. Second, second. Because Jesus suffered, when you suffer, you can be assured that this is as close to hell as you'll ever get.

[44 : 27] This is as close to hell as you'll ever get. Here's what I mean. Listen, come on, think with me. Because of Christ's suffering, listen, you were rescued from eternal suffering.

Because Jesus suffered, you were rescued from eternal suffering. In other words, somebody say, preach, preacher. You will face fiery trials, but you won't face a fiery hell.

So, faith in Jesus that got you out of hell will get you through the fires of life.

Think about that, right? The faith in Jesus that got you out of the fire of hell will get you through the fires of life. Because this is as bad as it will ever get for you.

And listen, I say that sensitively. I know there are people in this room that have really, really suffered. But you won't ever suffer true hell.

[45 : 37] I didn't even write this, and this just came to my mind. And it may only be Saturday night that gets this, so you better listen in. Because do you know what true hell really is?

The absence of the presence of God. Which means, no matter what fire you go through, God is with you.

So it can't be hell. For God is with us. You see why? I've got to think on Christ's sufferings in light of my sufferings.

Because Jesus suffered to rescue me from the ultimate suffering. This is as bad as it's going to get. This is as bad as it's going to get. And glory coming soon.

Thirdly, because Jesus suffered, when you suffer, you can be assured that whatever you lose will be restored at the resurrection.

[46 : 41] Because Jesus suffered, when you suffer, you can be assured, you can be confident that whatever you lose in this life will be restored to you a million fold in the resurrection.

Because listen, listen, what came after Jesus' crucifixion? You know, resurrection. Resurrection. The empty tomb.

Right? And so what comes after suffering in this life? But resurrection. What was taken on Friday was restored on Sunday.

And so let me break that down. You've suffered due to health. Your body will be fully restored.

You've lost family members. You'll have for eternity the whole family of God.

Amen. And I could go on and on. The point is, whatever you lose in this life through your sufferings will be restored to you a hundredfold at the resurrection.

[47 : 47] Listen, it feels like you have. But you actually haven't lost anything that won't be restored on the final day.

And you only get that through Jesus and His sufferings on the cross. So, how do we raise our shields in times of suffering?

Yes, I say it all the time. I'm a broken record and I don't plan on changing. Right? You think on your Savior and His sufferings for you.

Because if you think on your Savior and His sufferings for you, then you'll be able to raise your shields, strengthen your faith, when the fiery arrows come.

Listen, all of us like Noel have had to endure the fires of life. Some of you right now in this very moment are facing flaming arrows coming at you.

[48 : 55] So, what are you to do, Christian? You're to stand firm and be strong in the Lord. Lord, you are to raise your shield. Raise it up, faith family.

Raise it high, faith family. Trust God to fight for you because no matter how intense the fire gets, here's what I want you to know.

I told you, you'd hear this again. you, Lord, you, Lord, are a shield about me.

My glory, you're the lifter of my head. Let's pray.

Father, thank you. Thank you for this truth of the shield of faith. I know everyone in this room to some degree or another has had the flaming arrows fired at them.

[50 : 08] Amen. We take refuge in you. The object and perfecter of our faith.

We are not strong in ourselves, but we are strong in you. And having a clear vision of what this war looks like, we put on the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, and the shoes of confidence that we have through the gospel of peace.

And we raise our shields high, extinguishing the fiery arrows of these evil ones. And we stand together in you.

May this encourage us tonight in the trials of life or prepare us for whatever trials may come. And Lord, as we said, we look at this not through the lens of circumstances, we look at it through the lens of Christ, and that's what we do right now as we remember the crucifixion through the Lord's Supper.

And this is a time for us to think on the sufferings of Christ for us and all of the promises they have given to us in Him.

[51 : 33] So may this be a beautiful time of worship in Jesus' name. Amen. Yes, Thank you.