

The Armour of God: Shield of Faith

Trinity CRC, Edmonton, April 10, 2022, AM
Lent Series 2022 Armour of God, Baptism

Ephesians 6:16

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Readings: John 10:11-13, 24-28, 12:12-16; Ephesians 6:10-16

John 10:11-13

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

John 10: 24-28

²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

²⁵ Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

John 12:12-16 (Palm Sunday story)

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. ¹³ They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna!

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Blessed is the king of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, Daughter Zion; see, your king is coming, seated on a donkey’s colt.”

¹⁶ At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him.

Eph 6:10-16 The Armor of God

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 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.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Beloved people of God,

Shields are not something we see in our everyday life. But they are still around. Kids throwing snowballs at each other might discover that some sort of shield is helpful to hide behind, like a toboggan or something like a garbage can lid.

More formally, look at these pictures of some police. The one on the bottom left side is a single police officer using a shield to protect himself as he moves into a dangerous situation. The shield protects the main part of his body and his head while even providing a window through which he can see where he is going. That way he won't even have to peak his head out from behind the shield. The other picture on the bottom is a group of riot police preparing to take action if necessary. Their shields are mostly down low but very close so they can grab them as soon as they need that extra level of protection. And the picture above it shows a group of police covered from head to toe behind their shields and also covering their heads. That's nicknamed a turtle formation—one hard shell over the whole group. Pretty cool! And I want you to remember that. Turtling is important.

Modern shields and ancient shields serve the same basic functions and were used in very similar ways.

The Armour of God

Now let's look at our text again. We're talking about the Armour of God. We've considered the belt of truth, the first piece of armour which reminds us of building our lives on Jesus as the Truth and living by his truth every day. The breastplate is held in place by the belt, reminding us that our righteousness is held in place through Jesus and he empowers us to seek righteousness and justice in our lives. Then we had the boots of peace and they remind us that we are at peace with God through Jesus alone and, again, in his strength, we aim to be peacemakers in our workplace and everywhere else. So those are the first three pieces of armour that Christians have. They are ours in Christ, but we need to put them on—learn how to live into the truth of each piece—in order to stand strong in a world that tries to break our confidence in Christ.

Now in addition to putting on those pieces, we are called to take up the shield, helmet and sword. These are additional defence items and can also serve some offensive effort. Our text today says,

Eph 6:16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.

Shields of Protection

As we've already seen from modern illustrations, shields are for protection. They are mostly defensive in nature. Riot police have shields to keep them safe from rocks and bricks or other things protesters might throw at them. Some modern shields can even withstand bullets.

The imagery of Paul in Ephesians 6 comes from how he knew Roman soldiers did battle. And I think we do well to start by recognizing that they fought as a group. The shields were all held side by side and overhead to form the turtle shell effect. In Roman times, the early shields that Paul is referencing were made of wood and then covered with leather. The enemy would often shoot flaming arrows to start fires and distract their opponents or burn their encampments. So, *turtling* protected the whole group of soldier from having any of those fiery arrows break through their shell. And to help extinguish the flames, they soaked the leather in water. Primitive technology but it worked!

I have read lots of commentaries and listened to some speakers talking about the importance of a personal shield as a Christian. We need to be protected from the attacks of Satan, they will say. And that's true. We all should take responsibility for knowing the Bible so that we know how God wants us to live. Remember that the Lord only gives us guidance from his word in order to protect us from evil and to lead us into a life of fuller blessing. But as western Christians, we often stop at personal responsibility and neglect the more important part of protection.

You see, protection comes best through community. Paul is talking first to the church as a whole. His words obviously are important for individual Christians, but we aren't intended to be Christians in isolation. Paul calls the church the body of Christ for good reasons. We all need each other. And together we create the "turtle" shield with one another. So, keep that in mind. We might all have an individual shield but those work best to protect us like one solid turtle shell when we help one another.

How does that work? Well, let's say a guy struggles with pornography and thinks he can stop on his own. Say your struggling with eating issues. Maybe you're feeling sad, unloved. It could be a temptation or a trial. How do you deal with it? Maybe you can pray and commit Bible passages to memory that help you in times of temptation or darkness. Those good pieces to help get the victory, or put up a shield against the temptation of Satan and our human nature.

But having support is also important. Every recovering addict knows this. It's about creating a bigger shell of protection because others are standing with you to help you stand firm in the face of temptation or trials. You have a brother or sister in Christ that you can reach out to. Maybe even a group of people who help one another, upholding each other in prayer and with physical, emotional and spiritual support. This is the blessing of the family of God.

This is also what we promise to do whenever we have a baptism, like we did this morning. We are a covenant family. No one is expected to grow in their faith alone. We each need to take individual responsibility for our spiritual growth but that happens best in the context of the church. That's how God designed the church. We offer one another support in troubled times, encouragement in living our faith daily. We should never think we are alone. That's part of Satan's strategy to get us to stumble and fall. He wants us to think we can't stand against

temptation and hardship. He wants us to believe we'll fail and fall. He wants us to think we must do it alone because no one else will support us or understand us or want to be associated with us. So, if we try to stand alone, we often do fall. But when we stand together in the face of temptation and opposition, we are stronger and can indeed stand, just as Paul encourages the Ephesian Church to do! We have multiple layers of protection, support and care.

We should not be surprised that we can't stand when we don't rely on the help of others that Christ is giving us through the church. In fact, where the NIV says, "In addition to all this..." the ESV puts it this way, which I think is very helpful and insightful: Not "in addition to all this" but rather "*In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.*" All circumstances means we're all facing trial and temptations every day so there's nothing better than knowing that our Lord Jesus has given us a support system in the church to help shield us.

The Ultimate Shield

Now as much as the church serves as a shield for each of us, the real or ultimate shield is our Lord. Whatever shielding we as a church provide for one another is only because we are ourselves shielded by God first.

Think of the very first instance of the shield being mentioned in the Bible. We find that in Genesis 15:1. God says to Abram,

Gen 15:1 Do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield,

Your very great reward.

In those words, God is promising Abram that he will defend him. This is the opening verse of a chapter where God makes a covenant with Abram, promising him a son through which all the nations of the world will be blessed, and a land wherein the covenant people can flourish.

So God gives Abram the promise to be his shield as Abram begins a life of discipleship with God, a life of learning to follow and trust the Lord's leading and plan of salvation. God speaks those words after having just shown him his protecting power by delivering Abram and Lot with a small army of 318 soldiers against the might of 4 kings and their well-trained armies. God is showing Abram that the first shield needed is the Lord.

Years later we read of Moses teaching that lesson to Israel. After all the trials and challenges of leading Israel out of Egypt and shepherding them for 40 years, his final words to Israel are found in Deuteronomy 33:29 which says,

Dt 33:29 Blessed are you, Israel!

Who is like you,

a people saved by the Lord?

He is your shield and helper

and your glorious sword."

In the New Testament, Jesus takes on the role of shielding us from sin and the power of Satan. In fact, when we heard earlier from John 10 and 12, Jesus said,

Jn 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

With those words, our precious Lord paints this picture of himself as a shield who stands between the sheep and their enemies. He is shielding us with his very self. And, indeed, **we know now** better than the disciples when they first heard those words, that Jesus did in fact lay down his life to save us from our sin, from Satan and from death and hell. He even says later in that chapter:

27 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Dear friends, do you sense the precious love of Jesus. He lays his life down for us and protects us so much so that no one will ever be able to snatch us from his hands. We are shielded!!

This is the gift he illustrates on Palm Sunday as well. He came as king, not to conquer people with human might, not with human armour. He came to save people as a king who serves, instead of wanting to be served. He comes and his kingdom comes, as an old hymn puts it, "with deeds of love and mercy." When people shouted "Hosanna" which means "Save" they were looking for earthly protection from Rome. But Jesus lays down his life in order to give them and us protection from sin, Satan and hell. Through his death and resurrection, he becomes our ultimate shield! Our eternal protection.

Faith

But how does faith play into that? It's the Shield of Faith! Does that mean our protection is only activated by faith? Is the shield only as good as our faith is strong?

No, dear friends, that would be the ultimate insult to Jesus. Our little children sang *Jesus Loves Me* for us and reminded us that "we are weak and He is strong!" So, our faith is in Jesus not in our own strength. Remember how Jesus himself said to his disciples, "O you of little faith." Remember how he warned Peter before the trial of Holy Week that Satan would tempt him, sift him as sand. And Peter did fall in his own strength. Friends, let that remind us that our faith is believing that our protection comes from Jesus, not from our strong faith. I simply want to caution against thinking that our defense in the face of temptation and also trials comes through the strength of our faith. That is a common error among some Christians. And it has terrible implications, things we need to be saved from, like over confidence in ourselves and less confidence in Jesus!

Paul is saying take up the shield of faith, trusting the truth of the gospel—that Jesus has won the battle. Trust him to shield us from Satan's lies, from his fiery or fierce arrows in the form of temptation and trials.

Not so long ago, someone asked me if they didn't get the answers to their prayers they were looking for because they didn't have enough faith. Sometimes we believe the lie that we don't have strong enough faith and therefore we are sick or not healed or having financial trouble or any other struggle. We believe the lie that our sin is too great or we've done something too heinous for Jesus to shield us from Satan and hell. Oh, don't believe such lies, dear church. Our shield is not in the strength of our faith but in the strength of our Saviour. This is why we cry out, "Hosanna," Lord, save us! And like the Good Shepherd that he is, Jesus protects us and will ultimately ensure that we make it safely to heaven where he now is.

Look at our Lord Jesus, my friends. See his fulness and sufficiency for us! Trust him. Put your faith in him and let him shield you! Remember that Jesus comforts those of little faith. He prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. Jesus had sufficient strength. Take up the Shield of Faith knowing that Jesus our King of kings is our strength and shield. We believe *in* him, not in the strength of our own faith. To Jesus alone be glory and praise because he is our strength and shield. In him we will not be defeated.

Some of us may be familiar with the superhero called Captain America. He is famous for his mighty shield which is made of one of earth's strongest metals. Whatever his enemies throw against it, the shield never breaks. It is invincible.

So they sing when Captain America raises his mighty shield and they praise him. Today, sin and temptation might come against you, sickness might attack your body, problems arise in your life that challenge your faith. Friends, Jesus is our shield because of what he did on the cross.

Interestingly, the shields of old normally had the emblem of their king up front and visible for the enemy to see. Likewise, may we hold up our shield of Christ. And may we do so together. We can shelter together—turtling—in the security of his finished work. In response, we simply worship and follow him—listen to his voice—in the certainty that he is our shield and will lead us into victory.

And all God's people say, "Amen."