

Armor – Developing our faith:

Ephesians 6:16

16) In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one

Recap:

We started last week looking at the whole area of the shield of faith.

We started off by commenting on the first thing we noticed is that the shield is usable in ALL circumstances.

That the shield is something we must take up.
We must actively pick it up and apply it to all the situations that we face.

That this shield is useful to extinguish, stifle or suppress any of the flaming darts thrown at you by the enemy to attack your faith.

Notice it does not say that it makes those arrows disappear.

Notice that it does not say that they will not be fired.

Notice that it does not say that it will not hit you, hurt you or wound you.

We noticed that the assumption is that attacks will come and have a weapon that will not only full protect you but can be used to extinguish these attacks.

We then talked about how the arrows come and they are fiery.
They are designed to wound and burn us.
To disfigure our faith and strike fear into other believers.

And we also commented on the fact that Paul calls our enemy *the evil one*.

Satan and his forces are very real and there attacks are very personal.

So we went through all of that and we came to the question of what this shield was made of.

The roman shields were made of wood, hide and brass or copper.

Our shield is made up of faith.

That is the very substances of our shield.

Because of the nature of our day and the time we live in we spend some time redefining what faith actually is.

Let me remind you of what we talked about concerning faith.

So what is faith?

Faith in the Hebrew means:

Steadfastness, trust, trusting, to be established, to stand firm

The Greek word behind "faith" in the NT is a noun, *pistis*; it is a term for forensic proof or evidence.

Therefore what Faith is, is the proof or evidence of a steadfast and trusting relationship with God.

Faith believes that God is who he says He is and can do what he says he can do.

It is my knowledge and trust in God that shields me from the attacks of the enemy.

He is the strong tower that I run to.
He is the shield that I hide under.

The more I know God, the more I can trust God.

The greater my intimate knowledge and experience with God, the greater my trust in Him, the greater my shield is.

My trust in God has the ability to extinguish any attack from any devil.

My trust in God has the ability to extinguish any accusation from any foe.

My trust in God has the ability to delivery me from any temptation thrown my way.

Let's talk about Dealing with the attacks of the enemy:

The Apostle Paul is not only telling us that we have a weapon to deal with these attacks from the evil one, but is telling us how to use it.

You don't let an arrow come through your defenses and attack your righteousness.

Your right-doing cannot take the impact or the severity of the attack; it is not designed to do that.

You must hold up your shield.

Your feet are shod with the readiness of your testimony and the good news of Christ.

You are ready to move.

To defend yourself against the attacks of the enemy.

You must be mobile, agile, moving your shield to meet the onslaught from different directions.

Faith here means *the ability to quickly apply as necessary and as promptly what we believe.*

So the shield of faith here can be defined as *the quick application of what we believe as an answer to everything that the devil hurls at us.*

This is why it is so important to know what you believe and why you believe it.

I believe that Jesus saved my soul. Good.

How?

I believe that healing is in the atonement. Great. What is the atonement?

I believe God wants to baptize me with the Holy Ghost...why?

How will you know you have received the gift?

This is why I tell people that if I can only have you for one service a week, then I would like to have you for Wednesday because we teach doctrine and leadership.

And every believe needs to know what they believe if they are going to bear witness to their faith.

If I can have you for two services a week, then I would like to have you for Sunday night as well – so you can see and be trained in the supernatural things of God.

I believe you need all three services so you can bring your friends and family to Sunday AM and gather in corporate worship and celebration and be instructed on victorious Christian living.

Sunday AM will prepare you for life.
Sunday PM will prepare you for service
Wednesday PM will prepare you for the battle.

Your faith can only protect you if you know what the word says and how it applies to you.

Faith is not merely an intellectual belief or theory.

Of course faith includes what you believe, but it never stops with mere intellectual assent.

Faith is always practical.

That is, faith always applies the truth.

It is the deep abiding sense that God has the desire, ability and willingness to do what he says he will do.

How does our faith work?

The cults have faith in faith.

We, at this church do not.

True Christian faith always points to its object and never to itself.

If you put your faith in faith, you will eventually become undone.

People who try and work up their faith or qualify for their faith or buy their faith throw works or offerings.... it will all always end in disaster and disappointment.

Let's look at a verse where Paul shows us this.

Romans 4:18-22 ESV

(18) In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

(19) He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

(20) No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

(21) Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

(22) that is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

Abraham had faith, but it was not faith in faith or even in faith in the promise...*he gave God the glory. Fully convinced that God was able.*

Abraham was saved by faith.
By seeing God as the source of his salvation.
By giving God all the glory.

Abraham's faith led him to God and allowed him to see God's promises and God's character, Abraham came to know God and trusted God.

Faith is an anchor for your soul.
An anchor is no good sitting on a boat.
An anchor is only effective if it is cast off onto something else.

True faith will never turn you inward to look at how you are living, but will always turn you outward to see how God would have you live.

Any preaching or teaching that has you as the object and facilitator of your miracle or faith has made you out to be a god (little g) of your own universe.

And that is a very dangerous place to be.

Because simply said.... He will have no other gods before him.

Preaching that builds a dependence upon a man, on a ministry on a gift is preaching that is usurping the role of God in our lives.

Ministry that holds them self up as the source of your miracle or the source of your healing or the source of your prosperity are usurping God and that is a very dangerous thing to be associated with.

How do we develop our faith?

So we have clearly seen from scripture that faith is the result of a relationship.

We have also seen that faith is the ability to respond to adversity and attack by applying the knowledge that we have of God.

And if our shield of faith is so effective in extinguishing the attacks of the enemy would it not be a wise thing to develop our personal faith?

Jesus gives us a tremendous and very practical lesson on how to develop our faith or rather the four things that hinder the development of our faith in Mark 4.

He is talking about fruitfulness in the life of someone who hears the word.

He is talking about the ability of that Word to take root and produce fruit in the life of a person.

Some a little fruit, some a lot of fruit.

In other words....

Faith is something you must use or lose – like knowledge.

Trust is something you must constantly prove yourself worthy of.

A relationship is something you must always be investing in.

Let's look at the scripture together:

Mark 4:3-23 ESV

(3) "Listen! A sower went out to sow.

(4) And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.

(5) Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

(6) And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

(7) Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

(8) And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

(9) And he said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

So Jesus outlines this story to a large group gathered to hear Him teach.

He finishes and He withdraws with His disciples, with the men that have followed Him and been with Him daily.

They gather around and start to talk about the days teaching and happenings and He finds out that the disciples didn't get it.

They didn't understand what he had been talking about all morning.

Not only do they not get it, but they don't get what Jesus thinks is basic and fundamental truth.

Have you ever felt like that?

Have you ever felt like the simple things just seem to elude you some day's...well we are all in good company.

Jesus looks at them and says:

"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

Basically saying...if you don't understand this parable...you won't be able to understand any of the others.

He rebuked them for being dull and slow on the uptake and goes on and gives them a much more detailed answer and insight into the parable.

This is a very well known scripture.

And what strikes me here is the very simple way Jesus tells us and shows us how we can develop our faith.

Now he doesn't say....here is a 10 step program, or here are the 16 prayers you have to pray to grow in God.

He actually highlights the defects that a person who struggles with their faith has, and then quickly states what the effects of those deficient's are.

So we know that if we want to grow in our faith, all we have to do is stop doing what he tells us to stop doing and we will grow how he tells us we will grow.

Mark 4:14-23-

(14) The sewer sows the word.

(15) And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, **Satan immediately** comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

(16) And these are the ones sown on **rocky ground**: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

(17) And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

(18) And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,

(19) **But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word**, and it proves unfruitful.

(20) But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold."

(21) And he said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand?"

(22) For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light.

(23) **If anyone has ears to hear let him hear."**

(24) And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

(25) For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

Now let's start where he finishes – Our personal responsibility:

Our responsibility is our Ability to Respond.

Were are up to in our Christian walk is no ones responsibility than ours...

(24) And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.

(25) For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away."

You are held responsible for that which is revealed to you.

That is the reality of growing in your faith.

You are held responsible for the revelation of grace and wonder that God shows you.

In fact we are told emphatically that we must *pay attention*.

We have been given a measure, a revelation, an understanding and if we do well with what we have we shall be given more.

In fact, the context of the whole conversation is the impact that the Word is allowed to have in the life of a person.

The seed talked about here is the word of God and the potential for His impact in the life of a believer.

Not everyone is equal in the life of faith:

Up until this point Jesus had taught in the synagogues
He has now moved His preaching to out doors.

He has moved His focus from the religious leaders to the earnest
seekers.

He is preaching on hilltops.
He is preaching from boats.

He was talk to those people who were beginning to follow Him.

He was given them insight and instruction in the ways of God and the
kingdom of God.

And He says to them very clearly...not everyone is equal.

You see for years the Pharisees for years had been telling everyone
the same thing...However their slant on it was that they were better
than everyone else, that they were special.

Jesus comes along and turns the tables on them.

He says...*Pharisees your right...not everyone is the same not
everyone is the same.*

He says *there are some who are just not going to ever bear fruit in
their life, there are people that are just not going to get it.*

*Then there are people who will get it 30% of the time, 60% of the time
and then there are those who will get it 100% of the time.*

*Not everyone has the same faith.
Not everyone has the same intimate relationship with the father.
Not everyone has the same level of spiritual fruitfulness in their life.*

He highlights the deficits of the established religious people who thought they had a corner on the market.

And goes on and says that your personal walk with God and relationship with the Word will determine your fruitfulness in the kingdom.

Not your enrollment in a particular denomination or the state religion.

Faith and fruitfulness is all about the Word:

He says first up....it starts and ends with the Word
This whole lesson is about the Word and effect that you allow the Word to have on your life.

And you are the sower, the custodian of the Word in your every day life.

You are responsible for the impact of the seed in your life.

You sow the word.

The effectiveness and the impact of the Word will increase or decrease as you apply these principals and as you develop an awareness of these things over time.

Now these principals not only apply to your personal devotions but to your attention to the Word here at Church.

If you come ready to listen.
Eager to listen.
Prepared to take notes.

If you go home and download the sermon, listen to it again, discuss it and think about it, it will change your life.

People have asked me...*when can we have discipleship groups, what discipleship material can I use? What program do you have for me?*

Listen, here is a thought.
Take personal responsibility.

Print off the notes from the sermon – they are all there every week.
Get together with some friends.
Read and argue all you want.

I have been in church leadership for 20 odd years now and I have never attended a church where more material is made available for free to people to help with their consistent spiritual development.

We have foundational Christian classes.

We have podcasts

Video casts

Notes

Men's discipleship groups

2nd Saturday

Collision

You don't need a program, you need a passion and you need to take personal responsibility and not expect to be spoon feed.

If you want to start a group with the ladies and young women in the church see Joni, Mel or Heather today and make a plan.

The less attention you give it, the less impact it will have on your life and you will reap the fruit of those actions and decisions one way or another.

So let's look at the four these things Jesus highlights to us.

The four lacks in our life that lead to a diminished impact of the word.

Lack of time:

The very first thing that inhibits our spiritual growth is lack of time.

*(15) And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, **Satan immediately** comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.*

Instantly it was removed.
The word was taken straight away.

We know we can defend ourselves from the evil one, Eph 6 has taught us that.

But here we do not.

We don't protect the Word.
We allow it to be taken from us immediately.

At this point you hear something that you recognize as the Word but you do nothing with it.

You don't write it down.
You don't make it an issue you meditate on.

The moment you hear it, you are distracted from it.

All knowledge starts as general information,
It then has the chance to graduate to personal revelation then on to life application.
And then finally transformational and fruit bearing truth.

Matthew 13 says that before it even has a chance to take root in your heart it is snatched away.

In our day and age we give no thought to the value of meditation.

We leave no room in our life.

We leave no margins.

We are rushing from one thing to another.

Trying to cram one more thing in or get one more thing done.

We don't value a simple life.

We don't value taking our time.

If you have heard me say it once, I have said it 100 times; you can not hear God in white noise.

God will not have competition in our lives.

We will not compete with our television.

Our sports
Our novels
Our hobbies
Our jobs

He just won't.

If you do not make time for Him.

If you do not take each week the word that is revealed to you by preaching.

The Word that is revealed to you in private devotion.

The word will not bear fruit in your life.

Lack of depth:

*(16) And these are the ones sown on **rocky ground**: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.*

(17) And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

On rocky ground.

Shallow ground.

Ground that has no depth to it.

You hear the Word, it excites you for a while but you do nothing with it.

You determine to study, to learn to come to doctrine class to give yourself to the things of God and for a short time it all looks good on the outside, you're excited but the moment a little heat is turned up...your passion shrivels up and dies.

The moment a little persecution happens,

You back out of your commitment.

You change your mind.

You go back out on your word and you lose your fruit.

Friend, I have to fight for my morning study time.

I have to fight against taking phone calls, doing emails, making appointments.

People tell me...you need to come out, you have nothing on tonight...but I promised God I would stay home and read.

I have business friends who call me every week and ask me to come to big business opportunities every Wednesday and Sunday evening. Meetings worth millions of dollars...and they say...have some else preach...

I tell them, these are my sheep; I have a responsibility to the flock

They say, there is no money in it.

If you had more money you could do more. I say...these are my people, this is my flock, this is my decision, and this is my commitment.

Why can't you study at lunch time...why can't you have breakfast with me....because God gave me a revelation that I should give the first hours of every day to him.

I have to fight myself for these hours.

I want to stay up late and read or watch a movie, but instead I have to discipline myself to go to sleep.

I have to say no too many things in order to do the few that I should.

Many people are happy with a shallow life.

But then they must be content with little fruit.

You have to develop a depth to your personhood.

A depth to your character.

A depth to your commitment.

And it is not a commitment to be entered into lightly if it is to bear fruit.

The person who pays the greatest price in my house for my commitment is my wife.

She wants to watch a movie; I want to go to sleep.
She wants to sleep till the sun is up, I am rumbling around the bedroom while it is dark talking to God.

Most nights Beccy lies awake looking at the ceiling for an hour.

But I hope that she will be the person who benefits the most from my determination to not be a shallow man.

Lack of character and lack of ability to follow through on our commitments
limit and inhibited the Words ability to take root in your life.

Don't blame another for your lack of Christian development....your inability to respond to the voice of God in this area is your responsibility.

Lack of focus:

(18) And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word,

*(19) **But the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and...***

Your focus determines your reality.

When you allow the toxic issues of your thought life today to choke out the truth of the Word of God you are killing off your future.

The cares of the world...what the world tells me I need.

What the world tells me I want.

What the world tells me I need.

These things will destroy your ability to be fruitful for God.

When you hunger after things that are not of God, when you desire the ungodly and the world, when you allow the world and your flesh to dictate your desires you choke the Word.

The Word needs to establish the parameters of your life.

I loved the Old Testament.

God said here are ten things that for your own good I don't want you dothe rest...have at it!

I love that, simple, easy, not complicated...Jesus broke it down further...love God, love people...and enjoy the rest.

When you allow the cares, the competition, the concerns, the striving of the world to determine the object of your passion and the object of your worship the word is not able to take root and bear any fruit.

Lack of ears:

(23) If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

The biggest problem the disciples were having at this stage is the same we have a problem with...spiritual deafness.

They were listen, but not hearing.

This sermon is for someone else.
This passage is for someone else.
This alter call is for someone else.

I always marvel at the spiritual deafness and spiritual pride that holds stiff necked people in their seat when God wants to touch there hearts.

I always marvel at how people can sit and yawn during worship instead of lift their hands in surrender and sing.

It is not a matter of if you know the songs or if you can sing or not, or if you are tired, it is an issue of the heart.

Well I just think that is exhibitionism!!

Yeah, but it helps me know if your alive or dead.

And I am sure that arms raised in surrender to God doesn't offend him...the word says lift up holy hands and pray.

Can you hear Him church?

Can you hear the voice of God wooing you?

Calling you?

Hungry for you?

Desiring to touch and change your life so that you can produce much fruit.

Or is the call, ways and activity of the world to loud for you?

Some people are deaf to council.

They come and meet with me and talk and don't listen.

I can see it in their eyes.

They are waiting to hear something that will validate their position.

They want comfort in their sin.

Friend if you will not hear the word of correction, and apply the word of correction, you will not change.

If you do not change, you will not bear fruit.

What are you listening to?

Who are you listening to?

The voices you listen to will help you or harm you.

There is no such thing as harmless input.

If you want to grow in faith...4 simple things:

So if you want to grow in faith, if you want to see the fruitfulness of the word increase in your life, then...

1. Give God time
2. Give God your character
3. Don't get distracted
4. Don't be deaf

Don't be deaf to the Word, council around you.