

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

“Flaming Arrows”

Ephesians 6:16b

I. Satan deceives with many disguises (Genesis 3:1; Matthew 7:15; 2 Corinthians 11:14; 1 Peter 5:8) as he attacks with “*flaming arrows*,” which:

1) Come upon us silently and swiftly (John 13:2; Luke 22:3-4; Psalm 64:4)

2) Are shot not just by the evil one, but by whoever he influences (Psalm 55:12-14; Matthew 16:22-23)

3) Are aimed our way at the most opportune time (Luke 4:13)

4) Can cause the one struck to ignite another into sin (Gal. 6:1; Matt.18:6-7)

5) Can quickly inflame our sinful nature (James 1:14)

III. Only faith in Christ will protect us from the fiery attacks of the devil. Faith “*overcomes the world*” (1 John 5:4) and overcomes him who is described as “*the prince of this world*” (John 12:31).

“Flaming Arrows”
Ephesians 6:16b

As we have read from Ephesians 6:10-18, we pause at the 16th verse for our text: *“In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.”*

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Florida is known for its chameleons, - the small lizards with the long tails and darting tongues. They have that unique ability to blend into whatever background they are on, because they take on the color of whatever plant, fence, or shrub they are on.

But no chameleon can blend into the background and disguise themselves as well as our adversary the devil. Consider the unique ways that he can present himself: Genesis 3 describes Satan as a serpent. Many striking similarities: Even in a snake infested area, you often don't see snakes; you may hear them rustle through the grass, or hear the sound of a rattle, before you actually see the snake itself. Satan is also that way. He blends in very well and you don't see him and his cohorts until you are in close, way too close, proximity.

Similarly, a baby rattlesnake has enough venom to kill. We talk about “a little bit of temptation.” It's like a little bit of venom. If you are not careful, its enough to kill. Snakes also have vertical eyes, like cats. They can see in the dark. Their activity doesn't rest at sunset by any means, - and neither does the activity of the evil one.

We have also read, in the recent past, how Satan is described, in 2 Corinthians 11:14, as an angel of light. And we have seen what great damage he and his followers, who masquerade as preachers of righteousness, can do in the church. Along that same line, Jesus warns us that the devil and his accomplices wear an attractive wool suit, - for He describes false teachers this way, in Matthew 7:15: *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*

While the evil one and his followers have that uncanny ability to blend in like a chameleon, hiding their true identity, they also can be very up front and obvious in their attack. For instance, 1 Peter 3:8 says, *“Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion.”*

I was looking at some pictures of lions not long ago. The average lion weighs anywhere between 350-550 pounds and can run 30 miles per hour. The average lion eats over 15 pounds of meat per day and can consume over 60 pounds in a single meal. Those pictures, and their descriptions, gave me a whole new appreciation for Daniel. What an experience to be in the den of lions (Daniel 6). It also made me appreciate the faith of the martyrs in the early church who were routinely thrown to the lions.

Satan is described as a serpent. As an angel of light. A wolf in sheep's clothing. A lion. Satan has many disguises, for he is also described in Scripture as "*the god* - (small g) - the so called "god" - *of this world*" and "*the prince of the power of the air,*" among other descriptions. But here our in text, in Ephesians 6:16, he is simply described as "*the evil one*" who attacks us with "*flaming arrows.*"

Silently and Swiftly

The first reason we must be on guard against the attack of the evil one is because his arrows can come upon us silently and swiftly. One advantage that the Indians had in their wars with the western settlers was stealth. They could sneak up on the wagon train and shoot their arrows, silently and swiftly.

The arrows of the evil one work the same way. John 13 describes how the Passover was approaching. The Passover was a huge event. Over 250,000 lambs would be sacrificed in Jerusalem. The crowds were swelling into the city and the Jewish leaders were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus. In Luke 22:3 we read, "*Then Satan entered Judas, called Iscariot, one of the 12. And Judas went to the chief priests and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus...*"

Do you see how quickly the arrow went? How silently? None of the other disciples realized that Judas had been struck by the arrow of the adversary. Later he would leave the upper room, after that last supper, but the other disciples thought he had some business to take care of, probably with the funds since he served as treasurer. But he was struck. His shield had not been in place. He would betray Jesus with a kiss for the sum of thirty pieces of silver.

Multiple Shooters

Secondly, these flaming arrows are shot, not just by the evil one, but by whoever he influences. If just one Indian, back in the days of the wild west, snuck up in ambush on some settlers, he could do a great amount of damage. But when there was a whole tribe of warriors, the damage was multiplied many times over. General George Armstrong Custer, - and I understand the Indians have a legitimate argument of their own: Custer was encroaching on the land where they lived, - but his infamous last stand at the Battle of the Little Bighorn is a testament to power of many at work with a multitude of arrows.

But Satan is much more insidious than any human warrior. To him it is not enough to have the whole host of demons, fallen angels, on his side. He makes every effort to get people, even godly Christian people, to shoot arrows for him as he cunningly tricks Christians into shooting other Christians.

Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter shortly after Peter had made a wonderful statement of faith in Jesus? Jesus had asked, "*Who do people say the Son of Man is?*"

The disciples replied, *“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”*

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.” (Matthew 16:13b-17).

It was just after that confession that Jesus told His disciples that He would die. Peter began to dissuade Jesus. He said, *“Never, Lord, never. -This will never happen to you.”* - And you know the famous words of Jesus to Peter, the stalwart disciple: *“Get behind me, Satan.”* (Matthew 16:22-23).

Peter was aiming an arrow at the Lord. He didn't realize it, but the evil one was using Peter to shoot at his own Lord and Savior. And how often have Christians, in a weak moment, at a time when the shield of faith was not in place, not only been struck by the arrows of the evil one, but actually aimed those same arrows at another believer?

If we don't have the shield of faith in place, instead of singing *“Blest Be the Tie That Binds,”* we look for something to gossip about in another believer. Or some way to put a brother or sister in Christ down. Or exclude them from our “Christian clique.” Yes, Christians have cliques, too, don't they? Psalm 55:12-14 records this lament from David:

*If an enemy were insulting me,
I could endure it;
if a foe were raising himself against me,
I could hide from him.*

*But it is you, a man like myself,
my companion, my close friend,
with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship
as we walked with the throng at the house of God.*

Aimed at the Opportune Time

Third, these arrows are aimed our way at the most opportune time. One of the most ominous verses in the Bible is in Luke 4:13. The previous twelve verses have described the multiple and powerful temptations put before our Lord at a time of great weakness, for He had fasted forty days and forty nights. Yet Jesus resisted each temptation. He had set an example for us in using Scripture to drive away the evil one. Yet how does that segment end? Luke 4:13 says, *“When the devil had finished all this tempting he left Him for a more opportune time.”*

Just as Indians, back in the day when the west was being settled, looked for the most opportune time to shoot their arrows at the wagon trains, so the evil one, looks for the most opportune time to send his arrows your way and mine.

a) He often aims his arrows our way when we are already down. When a predator looks at a herd of animals, - perhaps a wolf casing out a herd of elk, that wolf looks for the weakest animal in the herd. The one that is sick, the one that is injured, the one who is at a low point will become the object of the wolf's attack. The wolf knows that because a particular animal is in a weakened condition, it gives him a clear advantage in the attack.

The devil is the same way. When you go through the hard times of life: sickness, loss of job, conflict in the family, death of dear loved ones, at all these various times of vulnerability the devil makes his assault: "There's proof," he says, "that God doesn't love you... He has abandoned you... You should abandon him and all those religious ideas you grew up with... Look at how messed up your life is! Being a Christian sure didn't get you anywhere! Renounce your faith!"

We've all been in those low spots. Some of you have been, and are now, in very deep waters. In addition to the deep troubling waters that come into every life we all are also prone to weakness, prone to stumble. And at those weak times we need that shield of faith we looked at last week. Otherwise the flaming arrows of the evil one will penetrate ever so deeply.

However, it's not just during the low times of life when the devil makes his assault. Surprisingly, one of the most advantageous times for the devil to send his arrows your way and mine is when we have achieved a measure of success.

If it is financial success he says, "See you don't need the Lord. And you certainly don't need his church. They are always trying to get your hard earned money! You're a self made man. You're a totally competent woman, you don't need that crutch of Christianity any longer. That's for weaklings, not for successive people like yourself!"

At times of personal success the arrow of the evil one frequently catches the successful person off guard. I can't help but notice that when a pastor falls, especially into sexual sin, he is often a successful pastor, at least as the world measures success. Whether at a low point, or a high point in your life, remember that admonition from 1 Corinthians 10:13: "*If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you do not fall.*"

The evil one is always looking for the best opportunity to shoot his flaming arrows, whether at a low point in your life or during the mountain top experiences. The adversary is always looking for the most advantageous, the most opportune moment, to send his flaming arrow of temptation.

Flaming Arrows

Fourth, these arrows of the evil one, directed our way at the most opportune of times, are described as flaming arrows, meaning that they can cause the one struck to be an instrument to ignite another to fall into sin.

Last week, when we looked at the first part of Ephesians 6:16 we saw that the wooden shields of the Roman soldiers were covered either with metal, or sometimes a specially treated thick leather. The reason why the covering was so important is because the arrows used in war back then were coated with a tar pitch and ignited with flame before being shot. The idea was to not only pierce with the tip of the arrow, but to ignite a fire, a fire that would spread from one soldier to another since they all advanced in a line toward the opposition.

By the same token we must be careful not be scorched by another believer who is burning with sin. Galatians 6:1 gives this clear warning: *“Brothers, if someone is burning with sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”*

How many Christian counselors and pastors have fallen as they tried to restore another fallen Christian? Sin and temptation are fires that spread as quickly as any forest fire caught by the wind, and great care must be used in restoring those who have fallen.

By the same token, when we fall into sin, we need to take great care that we don't ignite others with that same sin. In Matthew 18:7 Jesus says that it would be better to have a millstone around your neck - that is a very heavy weight, incidentally, upwards of 130 pounds - and be cast into the depth of the sea, than to lead any of His little ones astray.

And while *“little ones”* can specifically refer to children it can also have a broader application since we are all children of God, as the next verse, Matthew 18:8 points out: *“Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come!”*

Why is it so serious to lead someone else astray, when we are caught off guard because we don't have our shield of faith in Jesus in place? One reason is that although you might repent, you cannot repent for the person you have ignited to sin with you. For instance, David, when he put down the shield of faith, so to speak, and sinned with Bathsheba repented wholehearted and with deep heart felt sorrow as Psalm 34 and 51, among other passages, clearly teach.

But the adversary had used him to ignite Bathsheba. She was also guilty. But David could not repent for her. He could pray for her. He could witness to her. He could plead with her. But having seduced her into sin he could not repent for her and thus he bore the consequences for igniting Bathsheba into sin. I believe that Bathsheba was undoubtedly

repentant. But if you, in a weak moment, lead someone else astray, what assurance do you have that they will repent, even if you do?

The Tinder Box

A fifth reason to use that shield of faith in Jesus, to always stay focused on Him and His Word, is that the flaming arrows of the evil one are aimed toward a tinder box. Those of you with a wood stove or fireplace know that you need some tinder, some of the highly flammable materials, to start the fire. Otherwise the match won't get the other pieces of wood and the large logs started.

Our hearts are like that tinder. If the flaming arrow of the evil one gets past the shield of faith in Christ it lands not on a solid piece of oak that is hard to ignite. No, it lands on tinder described this way by James: *"When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."* (James 1:13-15).

The old phrase, "The devil made me do it," is not entirely true. He and his cohorts may shoot the arrows, but it is you and I who are responsible to use the faith that God has given us as a shield. And when we fail to, then *"each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed."*

We have only scratched the surface here, this morning. And it is not a pleasant surface. It reminds us of the hostility of the evil one toward our Savior and Lord, and in turn, toward us, those who by God's grace believe in Him. Because of those on-going attacks of the evil one it is crucial to have that shield of faith that we looked at last week. Faith in Jesus literally overcomes the world - 1 John 5:4: *"Everyone born of God has overcome the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."*

The world is filled with the flaming arrows of the evil one. And he has mastered the art of archery. He is crafty, cunning, silent, stealthy, turning even one Christian against another. No wonder he is referred to as the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, the serpent, the wolf in sheep's clothing, a lion roaring after its prey. He is the ultimate chameleon.

But God has given us the armor to withstand those flaming arrows of the evil one. Part of that armor is the shield of faith in Jesus Christ. May our faith, - our shield, - always be in place as we look to Jesus to withstand all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Amen.