

Believing Is Seeing

Seeing is believing. Or at least that used to be true. Today it's really hard to tell.

I want to show you a series pictures. You judge them one at a time. Are they real or are they completely designed by computer?

View all 7 http://www.autodesk.com/eng/etc/fake_or_foto/index.html

In our world "seeing is believing" no longer holds true. Last August CBS promoted Katie Couric as their CBS Evening News anchor by distributing a touched up photo which made Katie loose an instant 20lbs. Oh, if it were only that easy to shed those pounds!

But when we are talking about a relationship with God, the opposite principle becomes true.

There are three points that we'll focus in on this morning.

I. With God, Believing Is Seeing

In John Chapter 11 we read about the raising of Lazarus. While Lazarus was still in the tomb Jesus stood before it and commanded those standing around to remove the stone that sealed off the tomb.

Lazarus' sister Martha was there and she quickly protested. She said you don't want to roll that stone away. Lazarus has been dead 4 days and he stinks. His body is beginning to decay.

Jesus had a unique effect on graves and funerals. The guest of honor always came back to life. Jesus broke up every funeral He ever attended and He was just about to call Lazarus froth from his tomb.

But Martha couldn't see that, because Martha was struggling with her faith. And so Jesus turns to her and says, "*Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?*"

The principle when it comes to spiritual truth is not “seeing is believing” but just the opposite. “Believing is seeing.”

Jesus says, “Martha just believe and you’ll see the glory of God.”

The Bible takes this same principle and applies it to our spiritual warfare with Satan. It says, *above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.*

For several weeks now we have been involved in a study of our defense against the one the Bible calls the evil one. In Ephesians chapter 6, we’re given a rundown of what’s called “the armor of God.”

Using the armor of a Roman foot soldier as the basis of the illustration the Bible describes the various components of the protection that God has made available for our use.

All the way through the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, God’s truth and God’s people are under attack by Satan.

Sometimes his attacks are very open and obvious. We’re only 13 days into the month of May but already these incidents have been reported in India in May:

2 evangelists were beaten while holding a baptism service.

A group of 50 radical Hindus beat members of a congregation and vandalized their newly dedicated building.

20 Christians were attacked with clubs as they gathered for a home meeting.

A Christian school was attacked and vandalized.

Those are the obvious ones.

But, sometimes Satan’s attacks are more subtle, and usually the subtle ones are the most effective. In the West, its materialism, humanism and an “everybody’s right and nobody’s wrong” spirit that undermines our faith.

But in whatever form Satanic opposition comes, it’s final goal is to conceal truth, take life, destroy, enslave and tear down. So the obvious question is, how are we going to stand our ground?

How are we, as mere finite human beings, going to withstand the attacks of one who is so spiritually corrupt and brazen and so powerful as to try to defeat God himself?

The only way is to put on the whole armor of God. The only way is to have on each piece of the armor which God has provided.

Turn to Ephesians 6 pg 1041

The first part of the armor that's listed is the belt of truth. Through the truth of the Bible we know Jesus Christ who is truth. The belt of truth is a vital, living relationship with Jesus Christ. A Roman soldier didn't wear a belt as just an ornament. He used it to cinch up the rest of his armor and our basic preparation for the battle comes from being held tightly by truth.

Next we saw the breast plate of righteousness. Through Christ we have God's righteousness. We need to put on and live out that righteousness as a vital protection from Satan.

Then last week we saw that our feet are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

That's the good news that through faith in Jesus Christ we have peace with God, and that even though we're totally undeserving, the fact that we're forgiven makes our feet ready.

But then there is more. **Read vs 16**

There were two basic types of shields used by the Romans. Cavalrymen had a light, round, shield called *aspis*. They would strap it to their arm and they would be able to maneuver in battle and use the shield to deflect the blows of the enemies sword.

That is not the shield that Paul is talking about here. The Romans' had another very different shield called *thureos*. The Greek word for "door" is *thura*. The *thureos* was often called a door shield because these shields looked like a door.

You've probably seen the pictures of the advancing Roman armies and the first waves, the front lines, would be made up of foot soldiers carrying these large shields. The *thureos* was usually about 4' high and 2 1/2' wide.

When you had a whole line of advancing soldiers with their shields joined side to side

you literally had a solid wall that moved forward.

These shields were made of heavy plates glued together and then covered over, some with linen, canvas and then leather, and others with bronze or some other metal.

This wall of protection shielded the Roman army from the guided missiles of the day which were flaming arrows, shot by enemy archers.

They would take arrows with the ends dipped in pitch, or sometimes hollow reeds filled with a flammable liquid, and shoot them from a heavy but loosely strung bow. That way they wouldn't go out, but they could still be shot for long distances. They were the deadliest long range weapons of the day.

Now if your out there in battle and literally hundreds of these flaming arrows are falling down on you, you definitely want to make sure your behind your shield.

So we as believers are to take up our shields. There is some one who is raining fiery arrows down on us. He's the "wicked one.

We don't just fight "evil." It's not like we're just oppressed by evil but we're oppressed by an evil person.

We've already been alerted to the fact that were confronted by the wiles of the devil. And then not only the devil but his helpers who are called the "principalities and powers, the rules of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places."

The whole purpose is to emphasis that we are fighting spiritual persons, beings.

The wicked one is the devil and he commands and controls a host of powers and agents. We will never understand the problems of life in this world until we understand this truth. We'll never understand our own personal experience and what's going on in our lives, much less the whole state and condition of the world apart from this. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood.

Our striving, our problem, isn't just evil as if we could pass enough laws or educate everyone well enough.

Evil is not just some abstract idea. The whole teaching of the Bible is that evil is manipulated and propagated by the devil and his angels. Jesus Christ himself had to meet the devil, a scheming, planning being, in His temptation in the wilderness.

So then, we're to take our shield and behind that shield we will be preserved from all of the enemies flaming arrows.

So the obvious question at this point is, just what is the shield? God tells us clearly it is the shield of faith. It is the shield which is faith.

- I. *With God, Believing Is Seeing*
- II. *Our Shield Is Confidence In God's Promises*

George Muller ran Christian orphanages in Bristol, England in the 1800's. In all he cared for over 100,000 orphans and never once asked for money. He was an amazing man of prayer.

Muller defined faith as "the assurance that the things God said in His word are true and that God will act accordingly."

The basis of our overcoming in the spiritual warfare is our faith in Christ.

The Bible says in I John 5 *whoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

We are overcome because of our faith in Jesus Christ who is the author and finisher of our faith.

In Colossians 2:6 is the command *As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.* As you have received Christ live.

We receive Christ and His forgiveness by faith and that's how we're to live.

Faith is a personal confidence and trust in the promises of God. It's believing God for what He says.

God says we sin against his Holy standards but that He loves us and has sent His son to die for our forgiveness.

If we believe what God says about Jesus being the provision for our forgiveness we're forgiven. We're saved. We have to believe God about ourselves, sin and Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we talk about being "saved by faith" but when when it really comes down to it, it isn't faith that saves us, it's really Jesus Christ that saves us.

And in the same way God commands us to take up the shield of faith, the shield of confidence in God. But again, the real thing that shields us isn't our faith, but actually it's the object in which we have our faith.

There's an incident in the Old Testament that's a really interesting parallel to our shield of faith.

Abraham led 318 of his servants into battle against 4 kings to rescue his nephew Lot. Against all odds, Abraham won and so obviously his victory was due to God's enablement.

On their return the king of Sodom tried to strike up a bargain with Abraham. He said, I'll give you all the spoil of battle, the goods, if you give me my men who you have freed.

Now just before this battle God had told Abraham "I will enrich you."

And so Abraham said to the king *I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'*
Genesis 14:23

Now after this victory Abraham was in a lot of danger of the enemy returning and he needed protection. And so at the very beginning of the next chapter God says *Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.*

Now God didn't tell Abraham to take up his shield. Instead He said "I am your shield." God was promising to be Abraham's protection because of Abraham's faith in God.

Listen to King David, writer of the Psalms:

Psalm 33:20 *Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.*
119:114 *You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.*

Proverbs. 30:5 *Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him.*

The shield of faith is faith in Jesus Christ. And as Satan attacks a church, attacks our reputation, attacks our witness, our confidence in Jesus Christ is going to be the only thing that will quench all those fiery darts.

What are some of the fiery darts of the evil one? What are some of the burning arrows that come raining down upon us that we need to be shielded in Christ to avoid?

There are plenty. Certainly a lot more than we could cover in one message. But there's one major one that the others are based on.

I believe that Satan's most common fiery dart is doubt. Our shield is our confidence in God, doubt destroys that confidence.

The first time this flaming arrow of doubt is used is in the Garden of Eden. When Satan came to Eve disguised as a serpent and asked "Has God really said you're not supposed to eat from every tree?" he was trying to get Eve to doubt.

Then he went on to say that God didn't want her and Adam eating from the fruit because when they did, they would know good and evil and be like God Himself.

He was actually saying to Eve "You can't trust God because He doesn't always give you the whole picture. You can't trust God because he has ulterior motives. Trust me instead. Trust me, I'll give you what's best for you."

Satan was tempting Eve to doubt God and believe him. And that's exactly what she did. And that's exactly what you do and what I do every time we yield to Satan's deception.

Suppose we are tempted to sin. We just went through income tax time. Suppose your filling out your income tax return and you have a list of deductions.

And this thought keeps entering your mind, "Hey, why don't you pad that list a little bit? Why don't you think up a few extra deductions. No one will ever know. The chances are a thousand to one you'll get audited. And besides, you need the money more than the government."

The Bible says, *Provide things honest in the sight of all men. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars. My God shall supply all your needs according to his riches in Christ Jesus.*

That's a tempting avenue to take. And what it finally comes down to is you believe God who cannot lie or you believe Satan the father of lies.

God says, "I'll provide your needs, I give exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or think, Don't worry about tomorrow."

Faith believes God. Doubt falls to those fiery darts and eventually pays the price.

There's always a hidden price tag attached to sin, and some where down the line we pay in full.

Doubt manifests itself in other ways too. Sometimes we go through trying life experiences. Maybe it's an illness, maybe its a death in the family, a loved one. And Satan challenges us in our time of grief and says "So this is the great God you worship? If there was really a loving God in heaven how could he let this happen?"

When we go thru the tough times of life we need to remember something. Hebrews 13:5 God says, *I'll never leave you or forsake you.*

The Apostle Paul, who was the human author of this letter to the Ephesians was able to be victorious in adverse circumstances because he knew that Jesus Christ was trustworthy in every circumstance.

Because of that he wrote in Philippians 4.

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:11-13 NIV

Things we don't understand will always happen in our life. When we become pre-occupied in questioning and trying to find out the why behind all these things, if we're not careful, we give Satan an opportunity to undermine our faith his arrows of discouragement and doubt.

Even though we don't understand all that is being allowed to come into our lives, rather than becoming overwhelmed the the question of "why me?" we need to take the shield of faith by trusting in God and his promises.

When adversity comes into our lives, we need to stand on God's promises. Romans 8:28 says *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

You say, "Ed, I wish people would stop quoting that verse to me when I'm suffering. I get tired of hearing it!" Ever feel that way?

On the one hand we need to be careful of just throwing out verses before people are emotionally ready to hear them.

But listen, if you have trusted Jesus Christ as Savior you can know this truth with certainty even if you can't understand what God is specifically accomplishing.

When we're certain because of faith in God that He will work the things of life together for our good and His ultimate glory, we will have a different attitude about difficult circumstances.

I've had people say to me, "Ed, I don't care what the Bible says, there's no way my situation is going to work for good in anybody's life, especially mine."

And Satan says, "seeing is believing" look at the evidence. God doesn't care about you, if there really even is a God."

The only defense against that kind of vicious attack is the shield of faith.

"Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

We go on in Romans chapter 8, vs. 31 & 32 and read *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

Here's the question, did God sacrifice His Son on a cross for us? Then how could we ever believe that He's ignored us or rejected us?

God loves us with a love that went all the way to calvary for us. Can we believe that kind of God?

Satan says, "Doubt God, believe me," but has nothing to offer but emptiness, hopelessness and despair.

There's example after example of Satan's fiery darts in the lives of people in the Bible.

There was a guy named Jarius. His daughter was gravely ill. He came for Jesus and begged him to come to his house and heal his little girl.

And as he was there pleading one of his servants brought a message. It's all over. Your daughter is dead.

What a flaming arrow of despair and discouragement Satan must have shot right at Jairus' heart.

But Jesus turned to him and said the words we all need to be remind of over and over again. He said, Don't fear, only believe. Take the shield of faith and rest in Me.

We're not told what would have happened if Jairus would have walked away in despair and said, "It's too late forget it Jesus" But I believe he would have forfeited his chance to see God's glory.

Instead he took Jesus at his word. Even though he walked through the valley of the shadow of death, he feared no evil. He didn't allow Satan's fiery darts to pierce him and he received his daughter back to life again.

Then there's Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

There they were, young Jewish captives in Babylon. Strangers in a strange land. They had seen the armies of Nebuchadnezzar come in and slaughter thousands in Israel. They had seen their home land ravaged and destroyed and God's people scattered from the land He had promised the Jews as an inheritance.

Can you imagine the questions that must have gone through their minds?

"Whose gods are really the real and living gods
The God of Israel doesn't seem to be able to do much to protect his people!"

But they remained faithful to Jehovah God.

And one day King Nebuchadnezzar commanded them to bow down before a golden image. Something they were expressly forbidden to do.

It was probably an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. And the king commanded everybody to bow down to this thing and if you didn't the alternative was to be thrown in a smelting furnace.

As you might imagine, there was a big crowd that bowed. A lot of motivation to go with the program! But as Nebuchadnezzar looked out over this vast crown of his prostrated subjects, he saw 3 guys standing up; Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego.

He called them to stand before him and he gave them one last chance to bow. This pagan king says this, *And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?*

Talk about a time when Satan's fiery darts would be flying. Doubts, questions, fears.

But listen to their answer.

O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up. Daniel 3:16-18

"If God wants to save us from the furnace he will, if he doesn't want to he won't. But whatever happens, we believe God."

I'm impressed! That's the shield of faith.

Faith is to believe what you don't see and the reward of faith is to see what you believe.

The Bible says, *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith. I Peter 5:8-9. It says And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith. I John 5:4*

Now where does this faith come from?

- I. *With God, Believing Is Seeing*
- II. *Our Shield Is Confidence In God's Promises*
- III. *The Strength Of Our Faith Is It's Object*

One of the biggest mistakes that we can make is to look to ourselves to find the faith. Faith isn't some thing that you can pump up or work up in your life?

And we think "I could handle this if I only had more faith." And we look at our weak faith and become discouraged.

In Luke 17 Jesus explained to His disciples the length that God expected them to go to forgive others. They said, "We can't do that! Lord, increase our faith." Give us more faith.

And Jesus says, *If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be pulled up by the roots and be planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.*

Now what Jesus was saying was this, "You guys don't need more faith. The tiniest

speck of faith gets the job done. What you need to do is get your faith pointed in the right direction.”

Faith never turns in upon itself. We don't have faith in faith. As if our faith could get the job done. Faith doesn't save us, Jesus does.

The Bible says that everyone of us have sinned against God in our own way. The Bible says that God hates sin and punishes it with eternal death. That's the bad news.

Fortunately there's good news that follows. God sent His Son to die on a cross to take our punishment. Jesus final words were “It is finished.”

He took our judgment and God forgives all who put their faith in Jesus as Savior. Jesus said it so clearly, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.*
John 6:47

Faith always points to the character and power of God. The shield of faith is the application of what we believe to everything the devil hurls at us.

Faith always points to its object. And in that way it makes us strong.

And so where faith comes from? Intimate fellowship with Jesus Christ. Coming to know Christ through the pages of the Bible. A capacity to trust God comes from cultivating a relationship with God.

I guarantee you that before this day is over Satan will launch some fiery arrows at you. Take that shield of faith, that confidence in the reliability of the promises of God, and you will be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked one!