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Briefing 70: Wednesday 30th June, 2021.

Dear Friends,

The weapons and armour of the Christian – the Shield of Faith.

Wimbledon has begun, so of course the weather is now unsettled. But whilst that might have us reaching for an umbrella, when it comes to dealing with things falling on us from above, Ephesians 6: 16 would advise us instead to ***'Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.'***

Like all of the equipment so far, this is again largely defensive, and that was certainly so with the large shields that Roman soldiers took into battle. Shaped like a door, and often as big, these shields covered most of the body. They were also often covered with leather, and soaked in water, so that any flaming arrows fired by the enemy would be quenched. I say largely defensive, because although the shield offers great protection from attack, the armies of Rome, at least in Paul's day, were more concerned with pushing forward and taking territory than defending strongholds. These shields allowed Roman soldiers to advance on their enemy, whilst being protected from whatever fiery darts they had thrown at them.

What kinds of fiery darts does St Paul have in mind? Perhaps doubts or fears for the future, disappointments or loss in the present, or shame and guilt from the past. He might also have in mind our human weaknesses: shafts of impurity, selfishness, greed, gossip, envy and the like. But for all of these attacks, the chief way of avoiding injury and standing our ground is to shelter behind the shield of faith.

Faith means a reliance on God, on his character, his promises and his power. It demands taking our eyes off the problem, off our enemy, and fixing our eyes on Jesus. For when we look at him, when we are reminded of his strength, of his promises, of his love, then the battle no longer seems too fierce nor the enemy too strong. Let me give an example:

For some Christians, especially those who have been largely healthy for most of their lives, **serious illness** comes like a wrecking ball to their peace and happiness. In just a blink of an eye, dreams are gone, hopes are extinguished, and life is turned upside down. Sometimes these physical attacks are the direct work of the evil one (see Job!), but often they are simply part of living in a broken and fallen world. But whatever their origin, the fiery darts of the evil one soon come flying into our minds: *"See! I told you following Jesus would get you nowhere! Where is your God now? He's left you alone to suffer! You might as well give up on God and church and focus on enjoying your life! God has left you!"*

Doubts, fears, selfish thoughts like these can cripple a Christian, but not the one sheltering behind the shield of faith! The Christian carrying the shield of faith has a place to hide and a wonderful means of defence. It's not that Christians are unaffected by their suffering – it's that they are not overcome by it. By faith they are able to take their eyes off the problem and place them onto Jesus. Their pain may continue, their suffering may even lead to death, but their faith, worth more than any treasure, will stand the test of time and give them hope and a means of standing firm.

For the suffering and afflicted Christian, the shield of faith causes them to remember that they have a suffering saviour who suffered in their place and who intercedes for them in their suffering. It brings to mind the glorious truth that God is sovereign, and that He will be at work for their good, even through their suffering. It grounds them in the ultimate reality of eternity, and helps them recall that this life is only temporary and that after he had suffered and died, Jesus conquered death that they might have eternal life.

Faith sees Jesus and keeps us gazing at and trusting in his finished work on the cross and unchanging character and promises. And no fiery arrow, no matter how strong, can defeat that defence.

One more thing to note: When advancing on a stronghold, Roman soldiers would link shields together, alongside and above, so they could escape from even the strongest volley of arrows. That's a great reminder that our faith is always strengthened by other believers. It's why church is indispensable to the Christian, and why prayer partners and home groups are so helpful. And if your shield of faith is feeling rather feeble these days, you might want to think on that.

Grace and peace...

Dave

IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

Come + pray!

Friday night at St Nicks from 8pm-10pm.

Come + join us and pray for God's Holy Spirit to move in us and across this town that we might know more of God's love and power in our lives and see many brought to Jesus.

Private Prayer in St Nicholas church THIS WEEK and NEXT WEEK.

Tuesday from 2pm-4pm, Wednesday 12noon-2pm and Thursday 10am – 12 noon.

Tuesday morning from 7am-8am on Zoom. Contact Dave for a link.



MORNING COFFEE OR AFTERNOON TEA IN THE VICARAGE: The Vicarage Garden Café is now fully booked for **Friday 2nd July (3pm-4:30pm)** but there are lots of spaces on **Wednesday 14th July (10:30am-noon)**. We can take up to 30 people each time, sat at tables of 6 around the garden. If you like to join us, please contact Judy on email enquiries@saintnicholaschurch.org.uk

JAZZ NIGHT with Tim Boniface + band in aid of Oak Church Stevenage: 7:30pm Saturday 3rd July in the grounds of the Coptic Cathedral, Shephall. Tickets £10 (£5 under 18s) via info@oakchurchstevenage.org or Tel: 01438 746986.

DEANERY SYNOD SPECIAL EVENT: "The Seeming Absurdity of Black Lives Matter." Everyone is invited to this event at St Andrew and St George, Stevenage on **Wednesday 7 July, (7.00pm for a prompt 7.30pm start)**, where the speaker will be **Anthony Reddie**. Anthony is the Editor of the Black Theology International Journal, a fellow of Wesley House, Cambridge and was recently appointed as the Director for the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture within Oxford University, where he is also a fellow of Regent's Park College, Oxford. In 2020 he was awarded the Lanfranc Award for Education and Scholarship by the Archbishop of Canterbury for his exceptional and sustained contribution to Black Theology in Britain and beyond. Anthony will speak for about an hour and then there'll be time for discussion and questions. **Bookings are free and open now at** [Black Lives Matter \(BLM\) - Stevenage Deanery Tickets, Wed 7 Jul 2021 at 19:00 | Eventbrite](#)

CHURCH FAMILY BBQS - Sunday 11th July from 12:30pm, Saturday 24th July from 4pm. Booking forms are in church but you can also book by email. We're asking every family group to bring either some soft drink, a salad of some description, or a pudding to serve 6-8. We hope everyone will be able to come to ONE of the TWO dates!

BRIDGE BUILDERS CHRISTIAN TRUST: Building on the success of the online Christmas and Easter Journeys for year 2 and year 6 students across Stevenage and the surrounding villages, **The REach project** aims to produce an online interactive bible-based Journey for each and every year group throughout primary school, reaching upwards of 10,000 children EACH year. More details and ways to give are found here: [The REach Project | Bridge Builders Christian Trust \(bridgebuilderstrust.org.uk\)](#)

2 WAYS TO SERVE AND STRENGTHEN OUR FELLOWSHIP:

REFRESHMENTS: St Nicholas is still **VERY** short of people to serve refreshments after our services. If you can help in this way (*and it is so easy, no one would find it too difficult!*) please speak to Mike or Karen as soon as possible.

LEADING A WALKING GROUP: Both churches are situated on the edge of beautiful countryside, and walking is a great way to get exercise and to meet and encourage one another. Would 1 or 2 people like to organise a short weekly or fortnightly walk? Do let Dave know.

READINGS FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS: This week we start a new series in Genesis, and for those who'd like to read the passages before coming to church on Sundays, the readings for the next 3 weeks are as follows:

4th July: Genesis 4: 17-24 11th July: Genesis 4:25-5:32 18th July: Genesis 6:1-7:24

FUNDRAISING AUCTION: From 25th June to 4th July Herts and Beds Historic Churches Trust (who gave a generous donation towards the cost of the renovations at St Nicholas) are holding an on-line fundraising auction. The spectacular lots include tours of Hatfield House led by Lord Salisbury and of the Hendon RAF Museum led by Air Chief Marshall Sir Richard Johns. There are also some beautiful paintings by distinguished artists, two rods on the river Glass in Scotland, and stays in holiday houses in Wales, Scotland and Orkney. Full details can be found here: <https://saintnicholaschurch.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HERTS-AND-BEDS-CHURCHES-AUCTION.pdf>