

January 15th, 2023

Service for Swansea & Charlestown Presbyterian Church

Welcome & Prayer

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ. Let's begin with some words that are immensely comforting for those who belong to Jesus Christ. This is the first question from the Heidelberg Catechism:

Q. What is your only comfort in life and death? A. That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.

Christ Our Hope in Life & Death - [YouTube Video](#)

What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to him belong
Who holds our days within his hand?
What comes, apart from his command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death

What truth can calm the troubled soul?
God is good, God is good
Where is his grace and goodness known?
In our great Redeemer's blood

Who holds our faith when fears arise?
Who stands above the stormy trial?
Who sends the waves that bring us nigh?
Unto the shore, the rock of Christ

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death

Unto the grave, what shall we sing?
"Christ, he lives! Christ, he lives!"
And what reward will heaven bring?
Everlasting life with him
There we will rise to meet the Lord
Then sin and death will be destroyed
And we will feast in endless joy
When Christ is ours forevermore

Bible Reading – Psalm 91 (NIV)

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
 will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my
 fortress,
 my God, in whom I trust."
 Surely he will save you
 from the fowler's snare
 and from the deadly pestilence.
 He will cover you with his feathers,
 and under his wings you will find refuge;
 his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
 You will not fear the terror of night,
 nor the arrow that flies by day,
 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
 nor the plague that destroys at midday.
 A thousand may fall at your side,
 ten thousand at your right hand,
 but it will not come near you.
 You will only observe with your eyes
 and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you say, "The Lord is my refuge,"
 and you make the Most High your dwelling,
 no harm will overtake you,
 no disaster will come near your tent
 For he will command his angels concerning you
 to guard you in all your ways;
 they will lift you up in their hands,
 so that you will not strike your foot against a
 stone.
 You will tread on the lion and the cobra;
 you will trample the great lion and the serpent.
 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will
 rescue him;
 I will protect him, for he acknowledges my
 name.
 He will call on me, and I will answer him;
 I will be with him in trouble,
 I will deliver him and honour him.
 With long life I will satisfy him
 and show him my salvation."

Announcements 15/1/22

Focus for January – Rest & Refresh. Being busy is a good thing, isn't it? That's why we seek to stuff more and more things into our days. But I think many of us have reached a point where we are too busy and we need to do something counter-cultural and do less. How can we achieve that? What would it look like for you and your family? Maybe the place to start in this process is to aim to rest and refresh in January. Life is a bit slower anyway and most of our regular commitments are not on. Have a trial run in January and then maybe you can think about what it looks like for the rest of the year

Regular Activities of our Church will be in recess until NSW public schools are back on Friday 27th January. Our hope is that you will come each Sunday for worship (and help out where needed) and enjoy a rest from church activities for the rest of the week.

Kids Church over the School Holidays. As per the bulletin for Sunday 18th December

Vanuatu Short-Term Mission. Please pray for the team this week. Today they are leading two worship services at Hog Harbour Presbyterian church, one in the church and the other in the town's meeting square. Please pray that what they do will encourage the people of Hog Harbour and point them toward a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. If you want to know more about what is going on there are more details on our private Facebook page.

CHURCH CAMP. Theme "Family Reunion" Details on Facebook or pick up a handout. Dates: 3-5th March 2023. All registrations need to be in by Sunday 29th January.

Kids and Families Worker (approx. 8-10 hours a week). With Suzie leaving our position in January this year, we will be advertising and interviewing prospective candidates for her replacement in Feb/March this year. For more details please see Jon or Stephen.

Small Groups. Why not consider joining a small group in 2023? They are a great way to grow in your faith and to strengthen ties with other Christians. We run groups for men and women, young and old, day and night, ZOOM and live, weekly or fortnightly. You are sure to find a group that will suit you. Just see Jon, Stephen or one of the elders.

Family Fellowship. Stephen and Kaylen are hosting a BBQ and swim at their place (19 Imperial Close, Floraville) on Sunday 29th January from 12:15 pm for all families that have at least one child in Years 4-9. If that is you, please come along. RSVP to Stephen on 0426 829080 before Friday 27th January. It is hoped that there will be a regular social event for these families on the last weekend of each month.

God's Word for God's World has recently aired its 300th show. Many thanks to Peter B, Peter S, Aaron C, Sally W and Jenny M who do all the work behind the scenes each week.

Finances for December 2022

Budget Offerings for month	27,000
Actual offerings for month	26,161
Deficit for the month	839
Surplus for Jan-Dec	11,982

Many thanks to all those who have given sacrificially to the Church over the past 12 months. We were able to meet our budget and produce a small surplus which will be very handy as we think about a possible redevelopment in 2023.

Song – A Christian's Daily Prayer – [YouTube Video](#)

As morning dawns and day awakes
To You I bring my need
O gracious God, my source of strength
In You I live and breathe

Let every effort of my life
Display the matchless worth of Christ
Make me a living sacrifice
Be glorified today

Each hour is Yours by wisdom planned
Each deed empowered by sovereign hands
Renew my spirit, help me stand
Be glorified today

As sun gives way to darkest night
Your Spirit still is here
And though my strength fades like the light
New mercies will appear

As day unfolds, I seek Your will
In all of life's demands
And though the tempter tries me still
I cling to Your commands

I rest in You; abide with me
Until our trials and suffering
Give way to final victory
Be glorified, today

Pastoral Prayer

Lord God, you and you alone should be the sole object of our trust. May there be but one string to the bow of our faith: that is you, our Lord. May we not rest in anything other than you. Forgive us for when we trust in our heads, because our own understanding is an unsafe place to lean (Thomas Lye).

Pray for Jamaica: pray for repentance and deeper commitment from the predominantly Christian population. Pray for professing Rastafarians to come to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ. Pray for effective cooperation among the many Christian organisations already established in the country.

Pray for Webbs and flooding in Broome: Prayer for the Junjuwa Peoples Church in Fitzroy Crossing which is in an area that may have gone under, and for Pastor Phil and his wife Gail as they seek to care for people and direct them to Jesus in this difficult time. Aboriginal Christians are praying that this crisis will prompt their friends and family to recognise their dependence on God and put their trust in him but Chris said they need patience and stamina in the clean-up, and there will probably be a lot of unease about the lack of Government support.

Bible Reading – Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. **11** Put on the full armour 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 armour 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. **17** Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. **18** And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Sermon – Take Up the Shield of Faith (Jon Brown)

Everyone wants to be safe. The Covid years have shown us this haven't they? RAT tests. Social distancing. Masks. What's all this for? We see it with the bushfires too. Government websites tell us how to bushfire proof our homes. The yourhome.gov.au website says that "Ember attack is the most common cause of building damage or destruction from bushfires. Embers can travel well in front of the fire, entering the home through gaps and igniting the building's interior." If you're building in a bushfire area you can set up your property in such a way to shield your home from the fire, making it a safer space. All the new cars are loaded with safety features. 360* cameras, safe exit warnings, centre airbags.

And taking all these precautions makes sense doesn't it? The world is a dangerous place. We see the threat. The threat of sickness, the threat of natural disasters, the threat of car-accidents. And we do what we can to shield ourselves and our loved ones from harm.

But the Bible comes to us and says: OOI! There's an even greater threat to you. There's something more urgent that you can't ignore! It's a spiritual threat. There are spiritual forces of evil at work in this world. A bit far-fetched? What about the gassing of Jews, the sex-trafficking of young women. Bombing of maternity hospitals? These things are truly evil. The Bible gives us the origins of evil: the devil and his fallen angels. Evil spiritual beings who are at work in this world.

We all go to great lengths to ensure we are protected from various threats. The Apostle Paul writing to Christian in Ephesus in 1st CE, calls us to do the same. Eugene Peterson paraphrases these verses by saying, "This is no weekend war that we'll walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and his demons. Be prepared, you're up against far more than you can handle."

You're up against far more than you can handle. And that's why you need God's help. God's armour. And the piece we're dealing with tonight is in verse 16: "In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one."

Let's look first at the threat:

1. The Flaming Darts

If you picture the devil with red tights and a pitch fork, you're way off! He's called the EVIL ONE. Just think about that title for a moment. Sometimes people say, "I love you and want what is best for you." The devil would say, "I hate you and want what is worse for you. Martin Luther wrote, "His craft and power are great and armed with cruel hate." Armed with cruel hate!

If you're a Christian, the devil is shooting flaming darts at you. I'm not swearing! But this is bad. What are these flaming darts? They are fire bombs. This imagery comes from ancient war. It was a tactic they used where they'd take material and dip it flammable stuff. And they'd shoot the arrow at their opponents. And they'd burst into flames. Think Braveheart. The flaming arrows would cause chaos and confusion in the ranks. If one of these happened to hit you, you'd be a goner. You'd be out of action. And if the flame wasn't put out you'd be dead.

The Apostle Paul says, the devil's spiritual attacks are like flaming darts. The devil wants to burn down the work of God in your life. And the work of God in this church.

This is urgent. These arrows are constantly being shot at Christians. That's why Jesus tells to pray lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one. Cause we've got flammable hearts, and Satan's temptations could spark a raging fire.

These arrows can come in all shapes and forms.

- Temptations

Remember when Joseph was tempted? Potiphar's wife came and tried to get Joseph to sleep with her. And he said, "How can I sin against God?" And like flaming arrows they come out of nowhere. You're scrolling through something on the net, and all of a sudden a sexual image flies into your face. That's a flaming arrow. Temptations and...

- Accusations

In the Bible he's called 'the accuser of the brethren.' The devil hurls his darts in reminding us of our past sins. It might be August 28th today. "But remember what you did on so and so date. How can you call yourself a Christian when you did that?" That's a flaming dart. An accusation. It's the devil trying to get you to doubt your identity in Christ. When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within. Upward I look and see him there, who made an end of all my sin."

And if they're not extinguished they do a lot of damage. The devil can't rob a Christian of their salvation. But he can make you a sad-sack of a Christian. You can lose your joy. You can lose your assurance of God. You begin to question God's love for you. And that's just what the devil wants!

You gotta be prepared, you're up against more than you can handle! The devil has you in his sights. But also this church. He wants to burn down this church. We can't drop our guard! We can't get complacent.

The threat is real: the flaming darts are constant. And so we need protection:

1. The Shield of Faith

Any protection won't do! You wouldn't get a Covid vaccine to shield you from measles would you? You wouldn't put on your wetsuit to go skydiving? You need a protection that fits the threat. You need a measles vaccine for measles. You need a parachute to sky dive. And in the same way, you need the shield of faith to protect you from the fiery darts of the devil. This is spiritual warfare so you need spiritual armour! You need God's armour: you need the shield of faith. The word for shield Paul uses here isn't just one of those small round shields. Not an esky lid. Those ones left most of the body unprotected. The shield Paul is talking about here was special built for a purpose. It was big - the size of a door, the root word is pretty much the same for door and shield. These shields were made of strong stuff, bound with iron on the outside to put out the enemy's fire bombs. Full protection. Full cover.

The Christian's shield is their faith. Faith provides the spiritual protection you need. But it's not that faith has some great power in and of itself. True faith according to the Bible, doesn't get its power from itself. But from the object of our faith. If you jump out of a plane. It's not your trust that saves you. It's the parachute that saves you. You trust IN the parachute. It's what you believe IN that matters. It's faith IN Christ that is the shield! It's trusting in Jesus' finished work on the cross. That's what protects us from the devil's spiritual attacks. On the cross Jesus defeated the devil. Christ came to destroy the works of the devil. He came to set the captives free. On the cross Christ "disarmed the rulers, and authorities and put them to open shame triumphing over them."

We're not fighting for victory. We're fighting FROM victory. Victory was won on Calvary. Every sin was paid for. The debts was cancelled. On the cross God's love for sinners was definitively shown. Every temptation and accusation can be blocked by taking refuge in the finished work of Christ.

And the church is to stand together. Like the Roman soldiers. Shoulder to shoulder. Each of us holding up the shield of faith together. Covering the whole battalion. Can you picture it? The Lord has provided full protection. Full cover from the enemy.

But you still have to take it up. Faith isn't static. It's not something that's done once and we forget about. Faith is dynamic. It's constant. It's active. So let's finish with looking at what it means for us to "Take up the shield of faith."

3. Take Up the Shield of Faith

There's no use having a shield if you don't take it up! You gotta use it.

1. Let me first say a word to those who haven't yet trusted in the gospel. Maybe you're here tonight and you're not yet convinced by Jesus. You don't yet believe in Him. Let me ask you something pointed: could it be that the devil has you fighting on his side? And wearing his armour? The Bible says, if you aren't in the Salvation Army, you're in the Satan's army. And he's got you wearing his anti-God armour. The devil wants to prevent you from coming to Christ. He has put his shield of unbelief in your hand to block out God's mercy and love. Christ is standing at the door knocking. Let him. Now is the time. Now is the day of salvation!
2. Maybe you've been brought up in the church. And just assume you're okay. You don't need to do anything. But you do. You do need take up the faith as your own. You need Jesus as your own personal Lord and Saviour. My wife Ang grew up in church. She heard about Jesus dying on the cross probably multiple times a week. But it wasn't until she understood "the Son of God loved ME and gave himself for

ME.” That’s when she became a Christian, and professed faith. Faith is personal. Have you realised that? You should think about making your profession of faith.

So...My friend, there’s only two sides in this spiritual battle. Jesus said you are either for me or against me. If you haven’t given full allegiance to Christ, then you are still under Satan’s power. And he wants to destroy your life by getting you thrown into hell along with all the fallen angels! Come across to the winning side. How? Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Jesus said, hell is prepared for the devil and his angels. Not for human beings. You don’t have to go there. Trust in Jesus. Grab his hand and he will pull you out of the fire. And give you eternal life.

Song of Response – A Mighty Fortress Is Our God – [YouTube Video](#)

1 A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper he, amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Does seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.

2 Did we in our own strength confide,
Our striving would be losing,
Were not the right Man on our side,
The Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
From age to age the same;
And he must win the battle.

3 And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo! His doom is sure;
One little word shall fell him.

4 That Word above all earthly powers
No thanks to them abideth;
The Spirit and the gifts are ours
Through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
His kingdom is forever!

"Glory to the new-born king"
"Glory to the new-born king"

Closing Words:

24 To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— **25** to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (Jude 24-25)