# Monsters: Fighting Enemies of the Faith - Part 1

Shielded for God’s Purpose

(1 Peter 1:3-9)

This morning we’re beginning a new series entitled “Monsters” and we’re going to talk about fighting enemies of the faith; because we all face spiritual monsters in our lives; monsters who seek to devour our faith, to pull us away from the victory that is ours in Christ. And so, as Christians we must not only be aware, but be prepared to battle as true 21st-century monster slayers as we seek to live lives of faith in God.

Now obviously, on a large scale we’ve all been affected, at least indirectly, by the concern, the fear, and the anxiety, caused by the cowardly wickedness of that shooter in Las Vegas, not to mention the hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding, and fires. But even on a smaller scale, closer to home, and much more personal, I’m sure that there are many of you that are facing some really tough situations right now, and yet it’s during those times of suffering, of great trials and pain, that your faith will be strengthened, and God will take you to a deeper level of faith. You’ll be strengthened as the Bible says in Colossians chapter 1,

“If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

And so, your faith can become established and firm, unmoved by the difficulties of this life, but you need to know that you’re not alone, that God’s working, and you’ve been shielded for God’s purpose. You see, God hasn’t promised you a trouble-free life, but he has promised that you can be victorious, that you’re more than a conqueror. And so, this morning, we’re going to look at God’s purpose, and what he has put in place so that we can be monster slayers, never moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

Now some of you, you’ve been praying for God to do something, you know he can, but he doesn’t do it, he doesn’t take it away, he doesn’t answer the prayer, and you’re trying your best, but no matter how hard you try you just don’t seem to get any breaks. If that’s where you are today, or if you’ve ever felt like that, where it’s just like day in and day out you’re wrestling with those monsters, you’re fighting those enemies of the faith, I want you to know that you’re in good company.

If you’ve ever felt like that, you need to know that you’re not the only person. As a matter of fact, history records a list of very real people who’ve experienced the same things as us. Just consider David, a man after God’s own heart, but time and time again he cries out, “Where are you God? Why don’t you answer my prayers? Why aren’t you doing something? Are you even listening?”

Or how about Job? Read about Job and that’ll change your perspective. What he experienced will make you look at your struggles differently. I mean, Job was a righteous man, but the devil had marked him, Satan wanted to destroy him, and so he takes his health, his career, and his family. He’s suffering, he’s got sores all over his body, and his wife looks at him and says, “Why don’t you just curse God and die?” But Job says to her, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?" (Job 2:9-10).

Then there was John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus. He came before Jesus and God sent him to prepare the way for Jesus; he devotes his life to warning people to get ready for Jesus and ends up getting arrested for doing the very thing God called him to do. Now he’s sitting in jail remembering how Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, opened blind eyes, and he’s waiting and waiting, but Jesus never comes, Jesus doesn’t save him, and King Herod kills him, cutting off his head.

And then of course, we must consider the Apostle Paul who testifies in second Corinthians, “I’ve worked hard, been in prison, been flogged, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received 39 lashes, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, and three times I was shipwrecked. I’ve been constantly on the move. I’ve been in danger from rivers and bandits, from my own and from the Gentiles; danger in the city, the country, and at sea; as well as from false brothers. I’ve labored and toiled, gone without sleep; known hunger and thirst, and been cold and naked” (2 Cor 11:23-29).

This morning, if you are or you’ve ever been in that place where it didn’t seem like God cared, where suffering, trials, and pain were threatening to shipwreck your faith, you need to know that you’re not the only one. And so, as you and I challenge these monsters, fighting these enemies of the faith, we’re going to turn to the letter of first Peter in chapter 1. Now, any time you read Peter, you need to remember who Peter was writing to.  You need to remember the context, because he was writing to a group of Christians in Rome who were likely the most persecuted followers of Christ who ever lived. It wasn’t uncommon in those days that the Roman leaders would take Christians and as entertainment they would throw them into the arena of a huge coliseum and watch lions chase them down and eat them alive. It also wasn’t uncommon to find Christians tied to posts, burning like candles, streetlights on the side of the road. And so, it was to these suffering followers of Jesus that the Apostle Peter wrote these words.

He introduces this letter in verses one and two and then immediately calls his readers to praise God and fix their attention on something far removed from their current situation. He points them to the future and to the very fact that they have been shielded by God for his purpose and for an inheritance in heaven that can never perish, spoil or fade. Now remember, these were believers who had been scattered all over the Mediterranean world. Verse one says they’d been “scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). And so, these were believers who were refugees, these were Christians who were being persecuted by unbelieving and hostile pagan religions; they were hated, abused, intimidated, and troubled. But Peter, instead of addressing the very real possibility that they could be tortured or even martyred, tells them that these trials have come with a purpose; so that their faith, the most valuable thing that they have, may be proved genuine.

You see, if you’re suffering, facing trials, or pain today, God wants you to know that he’s shielded you, he’s protected you, he’s working on your behalf, and he has a purpose. You may not understand it, but Romans chapter 8 tells us,

“That in all things God works for the good of those who love him…” (Romans 8:28).

And so, I pray that you might take comfort in the goodness of our God, and even though you might not see it or feel it, but that you would embrace God’s purpose knowing that as the Scripture says,

“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Corinthians 4:17).

If you’ll look at your troubles from the perspective of eternity, suddenly they become a little lighter, a little briefer, and we’re able to realize that behind the pain is something even bigger than we could ever even imagine. Behind that suffering, that trial, or that pain is our God who is working it out, who’s redeeming the time, and has a purpose that is the best for you and for all those in his kingdom.

And so, here in first Peter, these first century believers are being threatened, they’re being intimidated, and they’re concerned as to whether they even have the faith to keep walking through the fire. And God the Holy Spirit through Peter tells them four ways that he shields them, shields their faith, which itself is a supernatural gift from God.

## 1. By a Living Hope

Number one, we’re shielded from those enemies of our faith by a living hope. Peter writes in verse 3,

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:3-4).

This is our hope, we’re shielded by a living hope, meaning a hope that cannot die. The Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 6,

“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure…” (Hebrews 6:19).

This hope is our hope to see Jesus, our hope to receive our eternal reward, and to enter into our inheritance in heaven. That’s our future, that’s the inheritance that Peter says can never perish, spoil or fade. It’s reserved for you, it can’t be corrupted, and it can’t be diminished in any way. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew’s gospel,

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves don’t break in and steal…” (Matt 6:20-21).

This hope is an anchor, heaven is the safest place to store anything, and our hope “enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf” (Hebrews 6:20). And so, Jesus went into heaven, he’s our living hope, and he anchored there our eternal hope.

## 2. By God’s Power

Number two, we’re shielded by God’s power. Verse five tells us, we are those,

“Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5).

We’re shielded by God’s power, it’s ready, it’s prepared, and it’s already accomplished. It’s just like the Bible tells us in Philippians chapter 1,

“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6).

This is the day that we long for, this is the day of redemption, this is the day when we see Jesus face-to-face, this is that time that John spoke of saying,

“Dear friends… we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

This is the day that we enter into eternal glory, this is the day that Paul spoke of saying,

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

We’ve been shielded by God’s power until our salvation is revealed on the last day. We long for that day, we long for his appearing, and we’re kept by the very power of God himself. That’s why the Apostle Paul can tell us with such certainty,

“I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

And so, we can be confident when fighting enemies of the faith, knowing that there isn’t any power greater than the power of God.  We have a living hope, we’re shielded by God’s power, and then number three, and this is very important, we’re shielded through all kinds of trials.

## 3. Through All Kinds of Trials

This is such good news! We are shielded, protected, by our living hope, by God’s power, and through all kinds of trials. Now, you may wonder how that could be, but just consider that these people had or were likely to experience persecution that would be manifested as imprisonment, torture, and even martyrdom. And so, they were fearing that their faith would fail, that they would deny Jesus, and to them Peter says in verse six,

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:6-7).

You could say this is the proving of your faith.  We’re shielded in all kinds of trials, and the best way to understand this is that God protects our faith not by keeping it away from trials but by allowing us to go through those trials. And so, we don’t live our lives in denial thinking that we’re never going to experience any suffering, any trials, or pain; we don’t have a false hope, but we have a living hope, shielded by God’s power, and we know that as we face all kinds of trials they’ll not only strengthen our faith, but they’ll also reveal our faith.

You see, every time you go through a trial it does something supernatural to your faith, it reveals true faith. James said it this way in chapter 1,

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2-4).

So, you consider it pure joy, because every time you go through a trial, you see the true nature of your faith. The more severe the trial the greater your faith and the more your confidence in God grows. We’re shielded from those trials, God protects our faith, he’s given us a faith that never fails, and our faith will come through stronger than ever. It’s just like the writer of Hebrews said about Jesus,

“Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9).

And so, we’re protected because God has given us a living hope, he’s given us a faith that’s shielded by his divine power, it’s tested and proven genuine through all kinds of trials, and then number four we’re shielded by our love for Jesus Christ.

## 4. Because You Love Him

Over the last few weeks we’ve talked about belief, because so many people say they believe in Jesus Christ, but I wonder, of the over 3 billion people who claim to believe in Jesus in the world today, if there are really that many who love Jesus. You know, people who love him sacrificially, with everything within them, loving him obediently and worshipfully; because if we were to define Christianity using only one word, describing the purest sense of our faith, you would have to describe it as “love.” Jesus said very clearly that this is the first and greatest commandment,

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37-38).

And so today, you and I are shielded by our love. Look at what Peter says in verse eight,

“Though you have not seen him, you love him…” (1 Peter 1:8).

That’s the bottom line, we have a love for Jesus Christ. Christ’s Community Church has a love for Jesus Christ. And this is so important, because love is the nature of true salvation. Salvation is not only characterized by faith in Jesus, not only by trusting in him, but by loving him. Peter says, “though you have not seen him, you love him.” As a matter of fact, the Bible says in first Corinthians chapter 16,

“If anyone does not love the Lord, that person is cursed” (1 Cor 16:22, NLT).

And then Peter continues saying in verse eight, “Even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8).

You could say, all of our Christian life is defined by our response to Jesus, our Christian walk is defined by our response to Jesus, our Christian testimony is defined by our response to Jesus; because Christianity is a relationship of loving, devoted trust, and therefore the Bible tells us in first John,

“We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

And so, it’s a loving relationship and it’s just like we talked about the “Lukewarm Christian” last week; there’s no such thing as a Christian who doesn’t love Jesus Christ. Your life as a believer is a continual walk with Jesus, growing in your love for him, and that’s why the apostle Paul says,

“I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Philippians 3:10-11).

You see, Paul knew that he was loved, and the more he loved God, the more he wanted to know him, and he knew that there was nothing that could separate him from the love of Christ. He knew that neither trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or the sword could change his love for Jesus. And so, as believers we love God with the love that he has given us. Romans chapter 5 tells us,

“God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us” (Romans 5:5).

And so, it’s a gift from God, just like our faith, and it’s this love that’s a component of our faith, a faith that can never perish, spoil, or fade kept safe in heaven for you. And that’s what Peter says in verse nine,

“For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Peter 1:9).

And so, no matter what monsters you’re fighting, no matter what suffering, what trials, or pain you may be wrestling with, you’ve been given a faith that never perishes. You’ve been given a faith that’s shielded by a living hope that never dies, a faith shielded by God’s sustaining power, a faith that is proven, tested, and strengthened in all kinds of trials, and a faith kept in heaven by your love. “You are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Pastor John Talcott

Christ's Community Church

303 West Lincoln Avenue

Emmitsburg, MD 21727

October 29, 2017

[www.cccemmitsburg.org](http://www.cccemmitsburg.org/)

Graphics, notes, and commentary from LifeChurch, Ministry Pass, Preaching Library, and PC Study Bible.

Scripture from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.