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WATCH OUT FOR THAT LION

1 Peter 5:8-9

The recent events in Afghanistan caused me to think about what feels to me like an odd aspect to some of the history I have lived through. From the time I was in high school until these recent events our nation has been at war for 30 years, but they’ve been unusual wars. First it was Vietnam, then it was Iraq and Afghanistan. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941 and our nation went to war with Japan and Nazi Germany, life changed for everyone. The war became a central fact of life. It was not business as usual. But for the many years we have been involved in these wars, it pretty much has been business as usual, except for the relatively small percentage of those actually involved in the fighting. When Michael was sent to Afghanistan as a Marine, the war became the controlling factor in his life. But I can attest that for most of you, life just went on as normal. You had no concerns with enemy activity, with rocket attacks or the threat of explosive devices or ambushes.

There is an even more strange fact. It is that there actually has been a war going on all my life, and all of yours as well. There has never been a moment of our lives when this war has not been raging. We aren’t at war with people, we aren’t in a physical shooting war, but we are in a very real battle. In Ephesians 6:10-12 Paul said our struggle, the war we must fight, is not with flesh and blood. Our enemy is not people. The enemy is made up of forces in the spiritual realm. We think much of the time that either this war doesn’t exist at all or it is like those wars our nation has been involved in, not really affecting our daily lives. We couldn’t be more wrong. This war is actually a central factor in the life of every one of us, even when we are not aware of it. We will get a glimpse of this in 1 Peter 5:8-9.

WE NEED TO WAKE UP TO THE WAR

In verse 8 Peter gives a call to battle stations. It is a blaring siren designed to wake us up. One of the verbs he uses is *gregoreo*, from which we get the name Gregory. It means to be awake. It is a sharp imperative that rings, “be awake, be on the alert!” He uses this kind of attention grabbing language because generally we are not awake. We are mostly in aware of what is really happening around us. We need to wake up to the fact that a violent spiritual war is being waged all around us.

Peter says we have an enemy, the devil, and he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for victims he can maul and destroy. Oh, right. The devil made me do it. Really, Rick? You are warning us about devils and evil spirits? That kind of superstition has no place in a modern, scientific society.

Back in 1973 a really scary movie came out and became one of the highest grossing movies in history up to that point. It was called *The Exorcist*, and it would be voted one of the scariest movies of all time. The movie was directed by William Friedkin, who is an agnostic. He admitted he had never witnessed an actual exorcism. So years later he traveled to Italy where he watched one. He took video of it as well. When he came back to the States he showed the video to two of the world’s leading neurosurgeons and researchers in California as well as to some prominent psychiatrists in New York. Dr. Neil Martin, chief of neurosurgery at UCLA, said of the subject of the exorcism after seeing the video, “There’s a major force at work within her somehow. I don’t know the underlying origin of it…This doesn’t seem to be hallucinations…It doesn’t look like schizophrenia or epilepsy…I’ve done thousands of surgeries on brain tumors, traumatic brain injuries, etc. I haven’t seen this kind of consequence from any of those disorders. This goes beyond anything I’ve ever experienced.”

Friedkin was surprised by the doctors’ responses. He said, “They wouldn’t come out and say, ‘Of course this woman is possessed by Satan,’ but they seemed baffled as to how to define her ailment…I went to these doctors to try and get a rational, scientific explanation for what I had experienced. I thought they’d say, ‘This is some sort of psychosomatic disorder having nothing to do with possession.’ That’s not what I came away with. Forty five years after I directed *The Exorcist,* there’s more acceptance of the possibility of possession than there was when I made the film.” Is it not obvious that a person cannot be possessed by something that doesn’t exist?

Journalist Scott Simon of National Public Radio said he always viewed the concepts of the devil and evil as cartoonish. But not any more. He now thinks it important to teach his children about these realities. He talks about interviewing Romeo Daillaire, who commanded UN peacekeeping forces in Rwanda when the horrible massacres happened there. Daillaire said what he experienced made him believe in the devil. He told Simon, “I’ve negotiated with him, shaken his hand. There is no doubt in my mind…(The devil is) at work and possessing human beings and turning them into machines of destruction…I think that evil and good are playing themselves out and God is monitoring…how we respond to it.”

Author Norman Mailer said, “If you don’t believe in God and the Devil, I wouldn’t say you’re crazy, but you are intellectually malnourished.”

But this whole spiritual war we can’t see, an evil enemy we can’t see, is awfully hard to believe. We can’t see it, touch it or hear it. Doesn’t that seem like pretend? You should know that thieves are now using something you can’t see, touch, hear or feel. If you leave a smart phone, a laptop computer or a tablet computer in your car while you are away from it, you should know that those electronic devices constantly send out a blue tooth signal. Thieves are now using Bluetooth scanners to detect the devices. Then they break into the car and steal the device. You can’t see the signal. You can’t hear it or feel it or touch it. You can go to your device settings and turn the signal off, then turn it back on. Do you know what you will see, feel and hear? Nothing. No difference. How do you know it’s not making the whole thing up? You have no way of knowing it is there. But it is not a pretend thing. It is very real. Why should we have no trouble believing that signal is real when we can’t sense it, but then say we can’t believe in something else we can’t sense physically?

Evil is real, the devil is real, as are his forces, and they are at work in this world. They have very real effect on people and events in this physical world. At times we get glimpses of the face of evil, and it is terrifying. But most of the time this is kind of a Bluetooth war. We may not physically sense it, but it has real effects in our world, spiritual, psychological and even physical effects. And we need to remember that as followers of Jesus Christ we all have targets on our back. We are high value targets for Satan. Cartoonist Gary Larson who did the Far Side cartoons had one that I thought was a classic. It depicted two deer standing in the woods. One of them has a target on his chest and the other one is saying to him, “Bummer of a birthmark, Hal.” Well that’s us. We’ve got that target right on us because the enemy hates beyond our imagination anything that belongs to God.

Peter warns us our enemy is powerful and vicious. He’s like a hungry, roaring lion, which is an intimidating and scary picture. Gary Richmond wrote a book in which he drew on his experiences working at the LA Zoo and called it *A View From The Zoo*. One story he related was about a new veterinarian, just out of vet school, named Dr. Bradford. He had never worked with a lion before. He was supposed to treat a lioness who was locked in her night quarters. Dr. Bradford leaned on the bars of her quarters to get a better look at her. Richmond says this lion, “Hated people and never tolerated anyone touching her cage. Knowing this I reached out to pull him away, but it was too late. The lion lunged at his face and roared. Now a roar under any circumstances is impressive; but inside a small concrete building, it is a major event.” The young vet fainted. When he came to, Richmond says, “He said something I will not quote in case children are listening. The essence of his comment was that he now believed in lions.”

The most graphic image that Peter could come up with to depict the malevolence, ferocity and power of Satan is a roaring lion. Scholar A. T. Robertson said, “The devil’s purpose is the ruin of mankind.” The problem for us is that life looks mostly normal to us. We don’t see battles, we don’t hear a roaring lion, but the enemy is there, he despises us, and he is inconceivably vicious.

In his book, *Spirit Warriors*, Stu Weber wrote, “We expect tomorrow to be like yesterday. Just another day at the office. Life is good. And then…our world explodes around us! Dazed and frightened we wonder how…our dresses got torn, our shirts tattered, our souls ripped to shreds and our lives filled so full of aching pain. It’s called spiritual warfare. And, my friend, that kind of war is no picnic…Know it or not, like it or not, you and I are in a war.” He goes on to say, “You have a dark and deformed enemy who seeks to consume you. If you are not alert, you could become a victim.”

This is not about spooky stories, eerie tales of demonic events and the need to be casting demons out of everything and everybody. In an article in *The Christian Research Journal*, Bob and Gretchen Passantino wrote, “Spiritual warfare is not the mumbo jumbo incantation of spooky experience, but the Christian’s daily and often mundane battle to die to self and live for Christ.”

What does it mean for Satan to devour followers of Jesus? What is his endgame? Satan hates God because God has the position that he wants. He is filled with an irrational rage that he seeks to vent on everything God does. So he has a malevolent desire to destroy every human being. He takes evil delight in seeing human beings suffer because he knows God loves them. What that means for those who don’t know God, is that Satan wants to do everything he can to keep them from ever connecting to God. To separate them from God is the worst thing that he could ever do to them, so that is his goal.

He tries to do that by a couple of methods. One is to embitter them against God. Perhaps by giving them terrible pain and disappointment in life he can turn them against God. Or perhaps he can even use the failures and ugliness of people who are acting in God’s name to bring about that end. Someone just passed on a great line to me recently. This is from a person who has been badly hurt by people who claim to be followers of Jesus. The terrible behavior of these supposedly religious people has caused her to be turned off to the church, but despite that she continues to have faith in Christ. Her comment about that is, “Light attracts bugs.” She sees the light and believes in it, but also sees that somehow a lot of bugs, creepy people are drawn to it.

But another strategy Satan will employ is to continually flood those who don’t believe, with the message that God is irrelevant. He wants them to believe that all that matters is that they have good things they seek in this life. He wants them to be obsessed with being happy right now. He tries to get them so enamored of this world that they don’t give God another thought.

The enemy will try some of those same things against followers of Jesus who are already connected to God. But they will receive special attention from him and some focused attacks, because they represent a threat to his agenda. Have you ever noticed that every thing you try to do to obey God is somehow opposed? There is always resistance to it. It is always easier to not do what God wants than to do his will. Satan’s goal is to strip us of everything God is trying to do in our lives. He opposes every bit of God’s will. He wins when we make the same choice the first two humans made, to decide to go our own way and seek life apart from God. That always ends up in death for us, and Satan is thrilled.

WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE ENEMY’S GAME PLAN

**He lies, especially about one thing**

In John 8:44 Jesus said of our enemy, “When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” If you go to Italy, what language do you expect to hear people speaking? Italian. If you go to Germany what will you hear there? Deutsch, or in our language, German. If you go to Japan what language will they speak? Japanese. Here in the USA what is the native language? American, of course. Oh, no, guess it’s English. Satan has a mother tongue as well. It is lies. In case you didn’t catch it, Jesus was using humor. How do you know when Satan is lying? His lips are moving. Satan always lies in some way. Every message he sends will involve deceit, dishonesty, a twisting of the truth. He may at times even mix in some truth to disguise the lie. He did that with Adam and Eve, and he did it again when he tried to tempt Jesus. But there will always be something distorted about the truth he quotes.

Notice that Jesus said Satan is the father of lies. I am the father of Carissa Townsend and Toby Myatt. I have more than once reflected on a part of history that has very personal implications for me and my family. My dad fought the Nazis in Europe in World War 2. That wasn’t the original plan for his unit. They trained here in California for making amphibious assaults in preparation for fighting in the Pacific Theater of Operations. But plans changed, and he was sent to Europe. When the war ended there, his unit was sent back across the Atlantic, then took trains across the USA, then boarded ships headed west across the Pacific. He was slated to be part of the initial landings in the invasion of the Japanese home islands. When you consider how the Japanese fought at Iwo Jima and Okinawa you know that those landings on the home islands were going to be a bloodbath. My dad’s chances of surviving those battles were not great. But he never had to fight in those battles. The atomic bomb brought the war to an abrupt end while my dad was on board a ship heading toward Japan. If my dad had to be a part of an invasion of Japan and he had died in those battles, I would never have been born. If I never existed, then neither would Carissa and Toby, nor would there have been Ella, Cara, Bria Myatt or Wesley Townsend. Without my father, none of us exist. All of that to say that Satan is the father of lies. Without him, lies don’t exist. Every lie that has ever been told traces its ancestry to him. Satan lies. He does it continually. Everything that comes from him is a lie.

I’m belaboring that point because it is crucial that we know that we cannot trust a single thing that comes from Satan. There is some distortion, some twist, some outright falsehood in everything he says. If we can identify him as the source of some message, we can know it is not trustworthy.

Behind all of Satan’s lies there is one big lie. It is the main message he tries to sell, though he packages it in a variety of ways. The lie is that you cannot trust God. In Satan’s first appearance in the Bible that is the central lie he tries to sell. After Eve joined in twisting God’s word by saying that he told them if they even touched the forbidden tree they would die, Satan said, “You will not certainly die.” God is lying to you. He’s just trying to scare you, but it’s not true. Then he said in Genesis 3:5 “For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” More lies from God, he claimed. God is trying to keep something good from you, something that will make you like him. He doesn’t want any competition, so he’s lying to you, keeping this great thing from you and lying about how scary it is because he doesn’t really care about you, he cares about himself. Satan said God can’t be trusted because he doesn’t want good for you and he doesn’t tell the truth.

Every time you hear the message that God can’t be trusted, because he’s not there at all or because he is trying to keep something good and fun from you, you can know exactly what the source of that message is. It is coming straight from Satan. It is the fundamental play from which he runs his entire offense. If you know Satan is behind it, what should you conclude?

Let me review the basic logic here. The message that you cannot trust God always comes from Satan. Everything that Satan says is a lie. Therefore, that message is also a lie. When you find yourself thinking that you can’t trust God, you should instantly say, “This is straight from Satan, therefore it is a lie, because he always lies. He’s lying to me because his goal is to destroy me.”

**He tempts**

From the moment he arrives on stage Satan is trying to get people to do something God has told them not to do. Oh, come on, you can’t really believe that fruit is bad for you, can you? We should always remember that Satan’s goal is to rob us of life, to harm us. Every coo and from God is intended to give us true life. So Satan will try to get us to go the exact opposite way because he is trying to ruin our lives. Everything he does is aimed at that end. Underlying every temptation is the same old lie. God doesn’t want good for you and he’s not telling you the truth. Do the thing he says not to do because that is how you’ll really find life. In other words, he is always saying that you can’t trust God.

I have a couple of grandchildren who won’t eat. As an adult this is mystifying to me, because I like to eat. But for some reason these kids seem to eat very little, and their culinary range is severely restricted. Somewhere down in their little kid brains they are believing the lie that parents and grandparents don’t want what is for their good. They think the only good is to eat one of the two foods that taste good to them. For Cara, that’s chicken nuggets with ranch dressing. For Wesley, that’s macaroni and cheese. To try to get them to eat something not on that extremely limited approved list is to get involved in your own personal Afghanistan, an unwinnable war. Those kids are not believing that in your efforts to get them to eat some nutritious food you are trying to help them. You are looking out for their good. They don’t believe it, so they resist the good you are trying to do for them.

Too often we are like my little grandchildren. The enemy has convinced us that we know what is good for us, and that God is actually denying it to us. We cannot trust God, so we have to go get what we know we need and want, just like Eve did.

**He discourages**

Satan shows up in Job 1:9-11. God has pointed out what a good man Job is. Satan says, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.”

Satan hates God. Because he hates God so much, he is astounded that anyone would actually worship God willingly the way Job did. He thinks there has to be some reason for that. So he concludes if someone worships God, there is a hidden motivation. The only reason he could see was that God gave Job the near perfect life. Sure Job worships you. It’s because you’ve bought him off. He knows which side of the bread the butter is on. He’s not going to bite the hand that feeds him. But you just watch. Quit feeding him and you’ll see what happens. Stop giving him everything he could possibly want and he’ll turn on you like a rabid dog. He’ll curse you to your face.

Satan believes that. He believes it in part because it’s how he thinks. But he also has seen that be true at times. He has seen that if he can make it tough enough on people, they will start to think God could have and should have protected them and given them better. They will stop believing in him, maybe even be angry at him because of how hard and disappointing he has made their lives.

Satan tried it with Job, and though it caused Job some struggles, it didn’t work. But Job’s story is in the Bible because it is exceptional. All too often throughout history this strategy has worked on other people. It worked on Job’s wife who recommended that Job curse God and die. Laurie and I actually had a neighbor who told us that she had once trusted God, but that the result was her life blew up, so she would never do that again. Satan’s discouragement campaign had worked on her. When he made it hard enough, she crumbled like a stale cookie.

In Luke 22:31-32 the night before Jesus was arrested, he said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Have you sifted wheat? Probably not, but you likely have sifted flour. I suspect that sifting is kind of an unpleasant experience for wheat or flour. It gets jostled all around until it falls through the grid without some of the unwanted parts. Jesus was not telling Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to send you Disneyland.” He was saying, “Be warned, Satan is going to try to beat you up.” And it would appear to work. But Jesus said, “When you have turned back.” Peter would fail, but not forever.

Satan is a sifter. He will try to sift us as well. On those days when you feel like life is just too hard, that it feels like God has abandoned you or even is deliberately making life hard for you, remember Satan’s sifting strategy. He is trying to defeat you with hardship.

**He accuses**

Revelation 12:10 calls Satan “the accuser of our brothers and sisters.” One of the ways Satan tries to defeat us is by flooding us with messages about how far short we fall, how useless we are, how undeserving we are. He hopes that if he can beat us up enough, we will believe the message that there is no hope for us, that God could not possibly love us and accept us. Most of us can testify to the fact that we often have a hard time believing that God truly loves us, that he delights in us, that he has totally accepted us and that nothing can ever change that. That’s because Satan is bombarding us with accusing messages.

You hear that you fail, you are such a mess God could not possibly love you. Every flaw is magnified. You are hopeless and worthless. Where do those messages come from? Do you think God is saying that? Is that what you want to tell yourself. Those messages come from an enemy who is trying to destroy you.

WE CAN AND MUST RESIST SATAN

Peter tells us the best way to respond to Satan is to resist him. This makes perfect sense. You only have two alternatives from which to choose. You are going to be attacked by Satan. The lion is going to prowl, and he wants to feed on you. You can’t change that. So his attacks will come. What will you do with them? You can either resist them, or you can be destroyed. You can let him overwhelm you and bring your life crashing down, or you can stand firm against him. It’s one or the other. It seems like resisting him is, by far, the best choice.

There is great news in a parallel passage. James 4:7 has a message very much like these verses. “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” Peter had told us in verses 5-6 to submit, to humble ourselves to God, just as James did in that verse. Then both say we should resist Satan. James adds some great news. If you resist him, Satan will flee from you! If you will resist, as James and Peter urge, Satan will run because he’s scared. He’s afraid of you, not because you are so awesome, but because God is with you!

One of my favorite Christmas movies is *A Christmas Story*, which features Ralphie Parker and his quest for a Red Ryder range rifle for Christmas. The story includes an encounter with the neighborhood bully, Scott Farkas (he had yellow eyes!) and his toady, Grover Dill. When I was in junior high at Compton Junior High in Bakersfield, there was a bully much like Farkas, though he didn’t have yellow eyes, and the bully had his own Grover Dill. I don’t remember the name of either of them, but they were well known for terrorizing people. Us boys did everything we could to steer clear of them and gave them a wide berth. One day the thing we all feared, happened to me. I had to go to the restroom. Before I finished the bully came in accompanied by his ever present toady. Their appearance was bad news, because there was no on else in the room. I hoped to just avoid any kind of encounter with them and get out of there, but it was not to be. They confronted me and began hassling me. I said nothing, but then, for no apparent reason other than just plain meanness, the bully began hitting me. This is what we all feared. I was going to get beaten up by these two mini-thugs. But an odd thing happened. His blows didn’t hurt at all. I didn’t try to fight back, because he wasn’t hurting me. The whole thing just seemed stupid. I stood there looking at him, trying to figure out what to do. Suddenly he stopped, backed off, looked at his toady and said, “Hey, this guy’s really tough! Let’s get out of here.” And they ran away. I shrugged, and went on about my business. James tells us that is exactly what will happen if we resist Satan. He will run away.

But how do I resist? What does that mean? I hear some people talking about ordering Satan to leave and things like that. Is that what I must do? No, it’s not that spooky. Peter tells you how to resist. “Standing firm in the faith.” You just stand firm, like I did that day against my own personal Scott Farkas.

Satan is trying to batter you, bury you in discouragement, he’s telling you how useless and hopeless you are, and he’s lying to you, telling you that you can’t trust God, that God doesn’t care about you and is not looking out for your good. Standing firm is quite simple. I don’t have to tell Satan anything. I just have to stay firm in my faith in what God says. God says he loves me unconditionally. Keep believing that. God says in Christ I am accepted into his kingdom and valued infinitely. Keep believing that. God says he cares for me more than I can ever imagine and he is working to bring about my good, even when I can’t see it in my circumstances. Keep believing that. God tells me that all of his commands to us are intended to bring about good for us. Keep believing that. Resisting Satan just means not buying his lies or crumbling under his attempts to bury me. It means standing firm in trusting what God says, believing him, and obeying him. If we will just stand firm in the faith, Satan will run with his tail between his legs.

CONCLUSION

In the spiritual battle with the enemy prowling, you need to do the 3 “R’s.” Not reading, ‘riting and ‘rithmetic. But these 3 R’s.

**Recognize**

Years ago when our son, Toby, was a senior in high school in the process of applying to colleges, we got a phone call one day that I thought was important. The person calling was from the athletic department of UCLA. UCLA was on the top of Toby’s list. Could someone there be interested in his athletic ability? I was kind of excited and called Toby to the phone, but when I did he calmly said, “Oh, just hang up.” I said, “But this could be important.” He said, “They called earlier. I recognized the voice. It’s somebody from my school trying to play a trick.”

He recognized the voice and knew what was going on. When we are hearing the lies, when the temptations are being presented, when we are being battered by bewildering and terrible circumstances, when we are feeling hopeless and useless, we need to recognize the voice. Ah, I know where this is coming from. This is Satan. These lies are from him.

**Remember**

Second we need to remember what Satan is trying to do. He is not trying to help us out. He is not trying to encourage us or set us free or give us life. He is trying to destroy us! To the degree that we listen to him or fall victim to his tricks we will experience what he wants for us, the loss of goodness and life. We need to be clear that these lies are aimed at hurting us, unraveling our lives.

Watching the Padres on TV was exciting for the first half of the season. It’s hugely disappointing that the second half it’s been a lot like watching the pitiful teams of most of the Padres history. But as we watched this year Laurie often commented on how often the players on opposing teams chat with each other. She wonders what they say. I don’t really know, but I do remember my last year playing college I played first base and I really liked talking to opposing players that got to first base. I also remember one of the most talkative opposing players I ever encountered. This guy was a catcher, and he talked non stop to hitters that came to the plate. I think it was in my third at bat at one point he said to me, “Hey, I really like you. I’m going to help you out. I’m calling for a fastball here and going to give him a target right over the middle of the plate. This is going to be your pitch.” I had to remember a key fact. Despite what he said, he did not want me to succeed. Whatever he was doing the goal was to defeat me. This is what we need to remember when Satan is telling us not to listen to God.

**Resist**

So that day in college I had to choose not to listen to the catcher. We need to do the same with our enemy. Once we see these things we don’t need to order Satan around or try to do some creepy spiritual warfare thing. We simply need to stand firm in the faith. Affirm that God is there, that he loves us, that he has forgiven us, accepted us into his kingdom, that he cares for us, and that he is working his plan in our lives, a plan that will bring good out of everything that happens and will end with the fulfillment of our greatest hopes. Affirm that God wants good for us, and obeying him is the path to life. If we will stand firm, Satan will run.