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THE LION DOESN’T SLEEP TONIGHT

Romans 16:1-24

Life is full of puzzling and sometimes confounding things. Why is monosyllabic, a word with 5 syllables, the term for a word with only one syllable? Who thought it was a good idea to come up lisp as the term for that minor speech impediment? Doesn’t that seem a bit cruel? Why do they call it rush hour when it is the slowest driving you’ll ever do? Why does Hawaiian pizza have Canadian bacon on it? Why do they make slices of bread square and sandwich meats round?

Does t it feel like sometimes has a curious perversity about it?They call Disneyland the “Happiest Place On Earth.” Have you ever noticed how many crying children you encounter there, how many people are actually kind of grumpy there? Life seems to have many creative ways to mess up what seem like good plans. Some of our neighbors looked forward to taking a camping trip with their young kids up to the Sierras. They cut it short because though it was beautiful, there were swarms of yellowjackets that made meal times intolerable. Ah, the great outdoors. Why does stuff like that happen so often?

Why is it that the foods that are so yummy are usually bad for you? Why are doughnuts, ice cream, French fries, unhealthy and broccoli and kale are good for you? Why is it that almost everything that is good to do, requires discipline? Why is it that when you determine to do something that is good, it will somehow be opposed in some way? Why is it that peer pressure almost always pushes people in the wrong direction? It’s just weird that taking the easy path, the path of least resistance, just doing what feels good, usually ends up being bad for you. I’m going to suggest today that there’s something behind at least some of that, and it’s something we ignore at our peril. You will see what I mean as we look at Romans 16 today, but focus mainly on verse 20.

Romans 16 is Paul’s final greetings to the Christians in Rome. He singled out 27 different individuals, plus several groups, to greet by name. Some preachers go through those names and preach themes from them. I’m not going to do that because the truth is we know very little about these people, and much of what is said about them is just guessing or even fabricated out of not much more than thin air. It is clear that there were some amazing followers of Jesus in that church. Paul mentions quite a few women. One of them was named Phoebe, a dynamic woman who served in ministry in many ways, including helping Paul.

There was Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple whom Paul said had risked their lives to help Paul. At that time they had a house church meeting in their home in Rome. There was Ampliatus whom Paul mentioned in verse 8, calling him whose a “dear friend.” His grave can be found in the catacombs of Rome today.

One of my favorites shows up in verse 22. Paul doesn’t mention him. He mentions himself. Did you know Paul didn’t actually write Romans? Paul had some health issues that made writing difficult for him. So he dictated his letters to friends who actually wrote them down. In verse 22 we see, “I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.” His name literally meant, “three.” It could have been a nickname. But it was also possible that he was a slave. Sometimes slaves were just given numbers. In verse 23 Paul mentions Quartus, whose name means “four.” These guys might have been slaves, considered insignificant by the world, literally nameless. Yet Tertius faithfully served and in doing so had a role in producing a world changing, life changing letter.

I would like to focus your attention on Romans 16:20, where Paul says, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”

SATAN IS AT WORK IN THE WORLD

Paul did not think Satan was a myth, a symbolic figure. This is consistent in the New Testament. In 1 Peter 5:8 Peter said of Satan, “Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” A couple of years ago we went to the San Diego Safari Park. We saw the tigers in their enclosure. What impressive animals. While we were looking at them, one of them cut loose with a roar. It was loud and impressive. Those are fearsome looking beasts. I had no trouble envisioning how, if they so chose to do so, they could turn one Rick Myatt into diced human. Then we dropped by the lion’s neighborhood. Yikes. They were even more terrifying.

Naturalist Craig Childs, in his book, *The Animal Dialogues*, described an incident when he was doing research in Arizona’s Blue Range Wilderness. He was at a water hole identifying tracks in the mud and making notes when, just before he bent down to look closer, he looked around him and saw a pair of eyes in the shadows of some trees about 30 feet away. It was a mountain lion. He expected it to leave, but instead it walked out into the sunlight toward him. Childs pulled out a knife and stared right into the eyes of the lion. He knew that lions can take down animals far larger than them. Their method is to attack from behind, clamp on to the spine at the base of the skull, then snap it. Mountain lions have been known to stalk people for miles. He knew if he ran, he would be a dead man. So he stood firm, staring at the animal. The lion began to move to his left, so he turned to keep facing it. Then it paced back to his right. It was trying to get behind him. Childs said staring at it was the only defense he had. It moved to within 10 feet, always pacing back and forth, trying to get to his back. Finally after some considerably unnerving time, the lion turned and walked away.

It was a frightening experience to be standing in the presence of an animal that had the power to kill him and was aggressively looking for a way to do it. Peter tells us we are in that situation. We are continually being stalked by a frightening and determined enemy. Peter used the image of a lion because it was the fiercest, most intimidating threat he knew. Maybe today, ever since the movie *Jaws* came out 45 years ago, he might have said our enemy is a great white shark, looking for someone to devour. The point is, we have an enemy who is very real, very dangerous, and very aggressive.

Having said that, I want to calm us down a bit. There are pastors and speakers and writers who make our battle with Satan, the major focus of their ministries. They say everything is about the battle with the devil. Every weakness, every sin, every struggle we have, they say, is because of Satan and his henchmen, and we must do battle with them. I agree that it is important that we be aware that we are in this battle. But there is something we should remember. The book of Romans is, by far, Paul’s most extensive discussion of the gospel and how to live out its implications. He has spent more than 15 chapters explaining how to live out the Christian life, and this is his first mention of Satan. In the 16 chapters of this awesome book, there is only this one brief mention of the devil. If dealing with Satan were the crucial point, the whole focus of our lives in Christ, don’t you think Paul would have discussed this sooner, and at considerably more length? While it is important to be aware of our battle with this enemy, it is also important to keep it in its proper place.

We do have this enemy, and he is trying to destroy us. The question is, how does he go about that? Just what is he doing? Let’s think about his tactics and strategies for a few moments. The most persistent tactic Satan uses is to question God. He always tries to get people to doubt that God can be trusted. He played that card the first time he appeared in the Bible in Genesis 3 when he suggested to Eve that God was holding out on her, keeping something good from her because he wasn’t looking out for her best interests.

This comes into play when we read some of the challenging things God tells us to do. Jesus says we should give up self to serve him, or that we should be a living sacrifice or that we should not be like the world around us. Can we really trust God when he tells us to do such hard things? The enemy says you’re crazy to do that because God isn’t looking out for your good.

This summer Toby brought Ella and Cara over to our neighborhood pool a number of times to swim. Ella made some progress on actually swimming this year. However, the deep end of the pool was still a problem. She could swim just fine in the shallow end because she had learned she is now big enough to stand up in the shallow end. So if there was any problem she could just stop swimming and stand up. There was no threat there. But she couldn’t do that in the deep end. The only way she could stay safe there was by continuing to swim, but she was not confident enough for that. Toby wanted to teach her that she actually could do it, so he persisted in taking her to the deep end, which led to some truly emotional moments. She wanted no part of it. He would tell her, “Ella, just trust me. I’m going to be right with you and I won’t let anything bad happen to you.” But her fear drowned out reason. Of course her Dad would not let her drown. He would take care of her, but she had a hard time trusting that. So it is with us. The Father says, “I’m right here with you. I’m going to look out for you.” But the enemy says, “You can’t trust God. He isn’t really looking out for you.” So we decide we’ll stay in the shallow end where we are confident in taking care of ourselves.

Satan seeks to divide people. He knows that unity glorifies the Father so he does everything he can to separate them and pit them against each other. ***Wherever there is division, Satan is at work***. That’s true in marriages, families, churches, neighborhoods, places of employment, teams, nations, even the world.

Laurie and I recently had one of those little moments that sometimes happen with married couples. Laurie was taking care of our youngest granddaughter, Bria, at our house. I was working in my office upstairs, but Laurie needed to get a bedroom ready for Bria to take a nap in. She said to me, “Rick, could you keep an eye on Bria for a few minutes? I don’t want her to attempt to go down the stairs.” I said I would do that. Bria was happily playing in the hall outside my office, so I kept working while making sure she didn’t get into any trouble. Bria was playing with the dollhouse we have for the girls. In the process of playing she broke the toy piano that goes in the doll house. When Laurie saw that she said, “Rick, I asked you to watch Bria, and you let her break this piano. Why didn’t you stop her?” She wasn’t happy with me. I wasn’t happy with her. She asked me to keep Bria from injuring herself, not make sure to keep the toys safe from her. It was a tiny moment of friction. I felt the urge to argue the point with her, but then I could see what was happening. Wherever there is division, the enemy was at work. I realized Satan wanted to use even a thing as small as that to pry Laurie and me apart, even if it was only a little. Satan was certainly trying that tactic in Rome where people were being separated by differences over food and holy days. Wherever you see people separating, dividing, arguing, at odds with each other, even in your marriage, realize the enemy is there employing his weapons.

Satan seeks to confuse and distract people with wrong ideas. He does this in two ways. He does it by trying to sidetrack us with false teaching. 2 Corinthians 11:3 says, “I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Later in verses 13-15 Paul wrote about some false teachers, “Such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servant also masquerades as an angel of light.”

He also does it by sidetracking us with lies about what we really need in life and how to get it. Again, you can see that in Genesis 3 when he told Eve what she really needed was to be like God and she could get that by eating the no-no fruit. He tried it with Jesus. He told him he needed to have some food or he would die, so he should just miraculously make some out of rocks rather than trust and wait on the Father. He told him he needed to rule over all the kingdoms of the earth, and he could have it right that minute if he would just bow before Satan.

Satan continually dangles things in front of us and tells us, this is what you need. You can get it by just doing what I tell you. There’s a familiar story in Acts 5 of a married couple named Ananias and Sapphira who fell victim to Satan’s lies. They had seen what happened when Joe, a member of their church, sold some real estate he owned and gave all the proceeds of the sale to the church. People were blown away by his generosity. Man, that Joe is really something. They were so impressed they gave him a nickname. They called him Barnabus, which means, “son of encouragement.” Ananias and Sapphira also had some real estate that they sold. They wanted to keep some of the money for themselves, but they also wanted the kind of applause Joe got. So they gave some of the money to the church, kept some, but told the apostles it was the whole amount. Satan told them they needed money, and they needed that kind of approval, and they could have it all. Peter said in verse 3, “Ananias, how is that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept some of the money you received for the land? Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn’t the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied just to human beings, but to God.” Satan filled their minds. You need to have it all. They could have kept it all for themselves. They could have donated some of it and been honest about what they were doing. That would have been fine. But Satan convinced them they needed to have it all.

Satan wants us to waste our lives by chasing mirages. There was a time when I found a song I wanted us to sing on Sunday morning. I told Laurie about it. She used it that Sunday. After church someone said to me, “Laurie does such a good job of selecting songs for us. I love that song we did today.” Almost immediately I said, “Well, actually,” before I stopped myself. I was going to explain that I had found the song. I was going to do so because I am a stickler for historical accuracy. I don’t want people thinking things that aren’t true. And if you believe that, I’ve got some crypto currency I’d like to sell you. It is that petty thing of wanting credit for something I did, because I have an insatiable desire for approval. Someone is whispering in my ear, “You need people to know how wonderful you are and to think you are the best thing since smart phones.” The enemy wants me to believe real fulfillment, real life, is found in approval, acclaim, notice, pats on the back.

That’s just one of many baubles he tells us we need, trinkets that surely will bring us true satisfaction and life. We need them, whether they be that new possession, status, some pleasure, acceptance from friends, the kinds of friends we think we need, the list goes on.

A classic devilish tactic is discouragement. The enemy seeks to bring us to a point of hopelessness and despair. He does this is two ways. One is by accusation. He pounds on us by relentlessly pointing out every weakness, every failure. He wants us to believe there is no way God could ever love and accept us. He wants us to feel so guilty, so inadequate, so unlovable that we become hopeless, and when we are hopeless we will just give up.

The other way the enemy tries to discourage us is by beating us up with hardships, defeats, obstacles and pain. The classic example of all time of Satan using this strategy was the life of Job. Satan was certain if he could hit Job hard enough, often enough, he would get exactly what he wanted. Job would do just what his wife suggested, curse God and die. Discouragement can easily defeat us.

Another one of the enemy’s favorite ploys is fear. He wants us to be afraid of anything and everything, because fear often eclipses faith. I recall walking our son and daughter in law’s dog Banjo. Banjo is a good sized dog with a big bark. We’d be out on a walk and he would be sniffing everything, but a if a little bird flew out of a bush near him he would dart away like some fierce predator had suddenly attacked. He was a ridiculously timid dog. He was afraid of things he had no need to be afraid of. That’s what Satan wants to do to us, because when we are afraid we tend to forget trusting and obeying God.

GOD WILL WIN

This verse has a terrific promise. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. God is going to defeat Satan. Satan is powerful and he is deviously clever. But he can’t beat God. God is all powerful. God will defeat him. Notice some details of that statement.

Notice he doesn’t say God has a chance against Satan, God might defeat him, or we know God can defeat him, but what happens remains to be seen. He says God will defeat Satan. It is 100% guaranteed. Notice also that he says he will **soon** crush Satan. Sometimes when Satan is doing his number on us it feels like it lasts forever. We think it will never end. It’s hopeless. But Paul tells us that it will end. And it will happen soon. It may feel like it lasts forever, but in retrospect it will not have taken that long.

It is also worth noting the term Paul used to describe how God will defeat Satan. He says God will crush him. Yesterday Alabama, one of the top two college football teams in the country, played an SEC opponent, a team in their league. They faced Vanderbilt. Bama won 55-3. They didn’t just win, they obliterated them. They crushed the other team. Paul says God isn’t just going to defeat Satan. He’s going to crush him. It’s going to be a total rout.

One more seriously important detail to notice. It would be easy to think, “Yes, I know that God will some day defeat Satan. He’s going to win in the end. The book of Revelation tells us about that.” But we need to pay attention to what Paul said. God will soon crush Satan *under your feet*. You are going to win. God is going to see to it. This is personal. The Roman Christians were being attacked by Satan, but Paul told them God would defeat Satan using them! And the same is true for us. This isn’t just about what God will do some day in his cosmic plan. He certainly will win in that great plan. But this is about God using you and me to crush Satan in our lives. We are going to rout this seemingly scary enemy. How are we going to do that?

Recognize the enemy’s attacks. What makes submarines such a potentially dangerous weapon system is that you can’t see them when they are prowling around under the water. You don’t know they are there until you find out because a torpedo has just slammed into your ship. How do you fight an enemy that you don’t see and don’t even know they are there? Crucial systems are used to combat submarines. Sonar is the first line of defense. Even super quiet submarines are machines and they emit mechanical noises. Sensitive sonar systems can detect those noises from far away and alert users to the presence and threat of a lurking submarine.

We need to keep our spiritual sonar turned on. If you have no idea a submarine is stalking you and about to fire weapons at you, then you are defenseless. If we find ourselves listening to doubts about whether we can trust God, becoming obsessed with our need for money, status, approval or some other thing, or when we feel discouraged and hopeless, if we feel there’s no way God could love us, when we find ourselves at odds with people we love, if we are inundated by fear, we need to recognize where all that is coming from. You can’t defend yourself against an enemy that you don’t even know is there. So the first thing you need to do is see these attacks for what they are.

Resist the enemy. Fight back. James 4:7 says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” That’s good news. Resist Satan and he will run away. What do people typically say is the best way to deal with a bully? Stand up to him and he will leave you alone. I don’t think that’s usually true, because bullies usually pick on people weaker than themselves, people they know they can dominate and intimidate. However, I only had one physical confrontation with a bully in my life. I was in junior high. There was a bully who always had his bigger buddy with him, and the two of them would terrorize the boys in the school. One day I found myself cornered in the restroom by these two. It was a situation I and everyone I knew did all we could to avoid, but somehow that day I was trapped in that restroom by the bully and his thug with no one else around. Sure enough the bully decided I was easy prey, a helpless victim. I didn’t even know the guy, but he apparently was an equal opportunity bully. In short order he started hitting me. I thought I was in for a bad beating. But an odd thing happened. He started punching me in the chest and stomach, but it didn’t hurt at all. He evidently figured his onslaught would cause me to cower and plead for mercy, but it felt to me almost like he was pretending to hit me. I didn’t know what to do so I just stood there looking at him, trying to come up with a way to respond. He stopped punching, looked at his buddy and said, “Hey, this guy’s really tough. Let’s get out of here.” Then they ran out of the room. I resisted, and he ran away! I never had another problem with him.

James claims that if we resist Satan, the ultimate bully, he will run away and leave us alone. That’s very encouraging, but how do we resist him? First, let’s thing about the word resist. Our daughter recently told us about a possible killer deal on a vacation option. Laurie and I have airline tickets to go to Hawaii next month. But we have been appalled at the cost of lodgings there. The deal Carissa had heard about was at a great resort, and the cost for 5 nights was just a little more than what we were seeing per night at similar places. In other words, it was about a quarter of the going rate. But I told Laurie I wanted no part of it. There was a catch. Several years ago we had a similar deal and ended up staying in a beautiful place. The catch was to get the deal we had to agree to take a tour of the property, which was new. That seemed fine and reasonable to us. It turned out not to be so fine. It wasn’t just a tour. It was a high pressure sales presentation that was as pleasant as being water boarded. They were selling time share condos, and when we said no, they brought out the manager to put more pressure on us. They did everything they could do shame us, make us feel guilty or stupid. It was tempting to agree to something, just to make it stop. But we stood our ground. We told them their deal made no financial sense, and there was no way we would agree to it. Finally, after what felt like days, they gave up and let us go. We resisted, and they finally relented. We said we would never do that again.

We stood firm in saying no to the pressure. The Greek word translated “resist” literally means “stand against.” That is what James tells us to do. Stand against Satan. Stand firm in saying no. You’ve recognized his tactics, you know what he’s trying to do, so just stand firm and say no, you’re not going to buy his lies.

That passage in James is kind of unusual, because he had not been discussing anything to do with the devil, so that comment seems to come from out of the blue. But the context gives us a clue to how we resist Satan. Verse 6 says, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” An important part of resisting the enemy is humbling ourselves. That means not being proud, especially not trying to take God’s place. Being humble means accepting that all of life is not about me. All that exists revolves around and is made to glorify God. So humbling ourselves and saying, “Whatever is going on, it’s not about me, it’s about you God.” James then tells us submit to God. In our humility say, “God, your will not mine.” When we do that we are resisting the enemy who always wants us to focus on ourselves.

The classic example of this is Job. After the initial tragedies struck and Job was reeling, we see his response in Job 1:20-21. “At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. May the name of the Lord be praised.” Job didn’t tear his robe because the latest fashion was kind of like the $200 ripped jeans of today’s weird trend. It wasn’t because torn robes were the hot thing. He didn’t shave his head because he was balding and thought that the shaved, cue ball head look is kind of cool. These were symbols of extreme grief. He was devastated. But his response was to worship God. He fell before the Lord and admitted life was not about him. He was born naked and would die the same way. Life is about God, so may the name of the Lord be praised.

James summarized all of that with one concise statement in verse 7. “Submit yourselves, then, to God.” When we say to God, “Life, including my life, is about you. It is about your glory, and your plan. So I accept your plan. I accept your will, and I live for your will,” we are submitting to God. And in submitting to him, we are resisting Satan. The main thing Satan is trying to get us to do, is to rebel against God. In submitting to God, we are resisting Satan.

APPLICATION

In 1939 a Zulu singer named Solomon Linda, recorded a song called Mbube, which was Zulu for “lion,” in South Africa, where it became a hit. In the following decades the song was picked up and recorded by several different artists. In 1961 it was used as the B side record for a song called “Tina” made by a group called the Tokens. It included repeated chanting of the word “Wimoweh,” which was actually a result of misunderstanding the original recording that had uyimbube, meaning “You are the lion” as a chant. It was titled “The Lion Sleeps Tonight.” It became a huge hit in this country and has since been recorded many times. It is, of course, a song we all know.

Here is what we need to remember:

THE LION DOESN’T SLEEP TONIGHT

Our enemy prowls about like a roaring lion, and he never stops. He never sleeps, he never takes days off, he never has a vacation. We need to know that he never stops attacking us. He is set on destroying us, and he seeks to do that by bombarding us with lies intended to get us to doubt God, to not trust him and to rebel against him.

WE MUST RESIST HIM

If I go one on one against a physical lion, it won’t end well for me. He is much stronger than me and much better equipped to kill. But that is not true with this metaphysical lion. We can resist him. The key is being aware of his attacks and what he is doing. In college I had an unusual experience in a baseball game one day. I as at bat and the pitcher’s first pitch to me was a nothing fastball that I jumped all over, but hit foul. I was licking my chops hoping for another pitch like it. The next pitch was slow and looked like it was going to be right over the middle of the plate. It was a little weird looking, but was very hittable. At least I thought so. I swung to crush that pitch, but before it got to the plate it darted violently to the left and down. I missed by a mile. I was left thinking, “What was that?” The next pitch looked the same, only this time it darted wildly to the right and down. I struck out. I was not a great hitter, had no power, but I rarely struck out. I went back to the dugout and said, “What just happened?” The coach told me the guy was throwing a knuckleball. Knuckleballs are maddening. They usually go slow, but they are totally unpredictable. Even the pitcher doesn’t really know where it’s going to go. One major league hitter said hitting a knuckleball is like trying to eat jello using chopsticks. I determined that next time if that guy threw me a knuckleball, I just wouldn’t swing. I’d hope his pitch would dart out of the strike zone, so he’d either have to walk me or throw me his fat fastball. If I was never aware that the pitcher was using that pitch, I would have had no hope. I had to recognize it for what it was and come up with a plan for how to deal with it. We need to recognize Satan’s attacks for what they are, and choose to resist them.

KNOW GOD WILL CRUSH THE ENEMY

This is such a key truth. Satan wants us to be hopeless and feel powerless. He wants us to given in to his stratagems because we think we have no other way to live. The great news of this passage is God is not just going to defeat Satan, he’s going to crush him. And he’s going to do it under our feet. As we resist the enemy God will see to it that he runs howling in pain and defeat from us. We just need to submit to God, and stand firm.

There are two crucial keys to resisting. They are grace an faith. God will crush the enemy so we put faith in him and rely on his grace. Satan tells us we are useless, worthless, fatally flawed, unacceptable, failing, so unworthy, phony. No way God could love us or use us. But our answer is, it’s all true, I am unworthy and failing. But God says his grace in Jesus Christ covers all of that. Satan says God can’t be trusted, but we put our faith in God, knowing he is good, faithful, he cares about us and he has a sovereign plan for our good, so we submit to him. Satan says to us, “Hey, Tertius, you’re a nobody. You mean nothing. You do nothing of any significance.” By faith we say, “You’re a liar, Satan. God says everything I do matters. He will make it matter, and God always speaks the truth.”