

## PEOPLE OF THE SWOOSH John 14:28-31

When the Pilgrims first settled in the new world they were able to establish peaceful relations with the local natives. Sadly those peaceful relations didn't last. As the population of colonists increased dramatically tensions between them and the native tribes grew. Eventually a war between them broke out in 1675, a conflict known as King Phillip's War.

In his book, *Mayflower*, Nathaniel Philbrick relates the story of one unusual battle from that war that took place at the town of Rehoboth, Massachusetts. The town was attacked by a force of Indians estimated to include as many as 1500 warriors. They burned down 40 houses, 30 barns and a couple of mills. The curious part of the battle was that only one man was killed. He was a colonist who believed that as long as he continued reading his Bible he could not be harmed. He was found dead in his home after the battle, still holding his Bible.

That man was mistaken. It is not uncommon for people to substitute superstition for faith. That was what that man did, thinking that reading the Bible was like some sort of talisman that could protect from all harm. His superstition cost him his life. Reading your Bible will not protect you from physical attack. Nor will merely reading it protect you from spiritual attack either, though it is certainly necessary for surviving such attacks. Rest assured you will come under attack. In an article in *New York Magazine* back in October, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia mentioned that he believes in the devil as a real being. This prompted a surprised reaction from his interviewer. Scalia said, "You're looking at me as though I'm weird...Are you so out of touch with most of America, most of which believes in the devil? It's in the gospels. You travel in circles that are so, so removed from mainstream America that you are appalled that anybody would believe in the devil! Most of mankind has believed in the devil for all of history. Many more intelligent people than you and me have believed in the devil."

The devil, according to Jesus, is quite real and he is a force we will have to deal with. We will see that in these few verses that we will consider today. Let's consider what implications this has for us as we look at John 14:28-31

## THE PRINCE OF THE WORLD WAS COMING

In the context Jesus has just promised peace to his disciples. The disciples needed peace because they were upset over the news that Jesus was going to leave them. Then he commented on his imminent departure saying, "If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I." Hey, wait, isn't the idea of the

Trinity that Jesus is fully God? Didn't Paul say that Jesus had equality with God? Didn't Jesus himself say that he and the Father were one? How could Jesus say the Father is greater than him? And why would that make the disciples glad that Jesus was going to him?

This statement by Jesus has generated centuries of controversy. There are a number of theories, but we should focus on what we know for certain. Jesus is not sort of a lesser God. Jesus and his men were all good Jews who knew that there is only one God. So Jesus could not be a lesser God. We must also remember that Jesus has made a point in this chapter that if you've seen him you've seen the Father. He is fully God. That theme echoes through John's gospel.

What did he mean then? To answer that pay attention to the context. Jesus said if the disciples really loved him they would be glad that Jesus was going to leave them to be with the Father. If the disciples loved Jesus rather than being upset for themselves because he was leaving them they would be happy for him. His departure would be hard on them but it would be better for him. His circumstances were going to improve dramatically.

Why were his circumstances going to be better? Because the Father didn't suffer from the limitations of human life or the frailties of a human body subjected to the ravages caused by the Fall...because the Father in his glory is never subjected to the criticism and rejection of men. The Father lived in glorious splendor where there is no doubt about who he is. In effect the Father appeared in his glory greater than Jesus. Now Jesus was going to join the Father in that far greater, more glorious circumstance that is immeasurably better than the life he courageously endured on this planet. He would have completed his mission of rescuing the human race.

That is the sense of what Jesus was saying. Let's suppose that Laurie and I are given a sabbatical (thought we don't need one). For this sabbatical imagine that we are going to be given a three month stay at a condo on the island of Maui. You don't want us to go because you will miss us so terribly. Church won't be the same without us. You express your dismay and sadness at our leaving. And I say, "If you loved us, you would be glad for our going for the beauty and rest of Maui is better than here." That is a little like what Jesus was communicating to his men.

Jesus then said, "I have told you now before it happens so that when it does happen you will believe." What was about to happen was frightening, painful, grievous and awful. It would look like a total disaster, a complete failure. It would appear that Jesus was nothing more than what his opponents claimed - a simple human being who had blasphemous pretensions of divine greatness. Jesus wanted them to know that none of what was about to happen was a surprise to him. He wanted them to know it was part of

his plan. Knowing that would help them believe. If it were a surprise to Jesus that he could not have averted because it was completely out of his control, then he was indeed just another human being helpless before the powers of this world. But that wasn't true. He planned all along for what was about to happen. He could have stopped it had he chosen to do so, but he actually wanted it to happen because it was key to his work of rescuing the human race.

Then Jesus said, "The prince of this world is coming," referring to Satan. Later John would write in 1 John 5:19 that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. That's why Jesus called him the prince of this world. He is not the king who rules the universe, but during this age he holds sway in the world system. He was coming in the sense that he was about to do his work. Satan wanted to defeat Jesus. He wanted to provoke people to reject him and execute him. Satan thought this would defeat God's work in this world.

We've seen before that Satan is not completely sane. Somewhere inside he knows that he is a created being and that opposition to the Almighty Creator is both absurd and hopeless. Yet he is so desperate for his own glory that he has convinced himself that he can somehow defeat God and take his place. He chafes when glory is given to God because he wants all of creation to give glory to him. So he is on an irrational campaign to destroy whatever God does.

Satan is the author of the way our world thinks. The "world system" is his doing. One of the principles of that system is that you win only by being on top and exercising power. Like most people he assumes everyone thinks like he does. He therefore thought that God's plan was to have Jesus take power and rule in this world because that's the only way to win. So he concluded the way to defeat God is to block what he thought was Jesus' effort to take control. The way to do that was to have him killed. That's what Jesus meant when he said the prince of the world was coming. He was using Judas, the religious leaders of Israel and the Roman authorities to destroy Jesus, gleefully thinking he was about to defeat God.

The prince of the world is coming still today. He is still at work, still opposing God. He is at work in your circumstances, day in and day out. Ephesians 6:12 says our struggle is against the forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:16 says we will be attacked by "the flaming arrows of the evil one." Satan is trying to accomplish two things.

First he is trying to *separate you from God*. He has done this from the beginning. He tried to get Adam and Eve to doubt God and to think they would be better off without God. He tried to get Job to curse God. In the wilderness he even tried to get Jesus to believe the Father would not take care of him and to operate outside the will of the Father. He wants you to make life about yourself and to decide that you are on your own.

God is irrelevant at best and working against you at worst. The thing Satan wants most is that you would have no relationship to God at all.

Second he is trying to ***destroy your life***. What did Satan want for Adam and Eve in Eden? Was he trying to enhance their lives? Did he think his advice for them would produce the best possible result but was sincerely mistaken? Did he tell them the truth? Satan was lying through his teeth. He knew that the results of listening to him would be disastrous for them and their descendants. And that's exactly what he wanted. Did he want the best for Job? No, he wanted to devastate him. Did he want good for Jesus? Absolutely not.

That is still what he wants to accomplish in your life. That's why he wants to separate you from God. He wants you to experience guilt, frustration, hopelessness, emptiness, anger, ruined relationships, loneliness and death. How does Satan do this? He lies to us, he tempts us to disobey God, he beats us up to try to discourage us and get us to doubt God. He tries to use the world system that he has created to deceive us and capture us. But he knows to be effective he must hide his schemes. Had Eve known what he was really up to she never would have listened to him.

A couple of years ago Laurie and I were in Hansen's Surf and Ski store. We were talking to one of the employees when an Amtrak train went by. I believe it was traveling about 300 miles per hour as it passed. As you know the tracks there are right next to that store. When that train roared by it was like the world was coming to an end it was so thunderous. I said, "Wow, that is really loud." The employee said, "It's funny, I've worked here for two years and I don't even notice it anymore." That's precisely what Satan wants for you. He is trying to beat you up, to lie to you, to dangle empty baubles for you to chase that will draw you away from God and from life itself, but he wants you totally unaware. He wants you to be like that employee, so used to his attacks that you don't even notice them.

We have a very materialistic culture. Seeing is believing for us. The spiritual and the supernatural are just fairy tales. They make good movies and television shows, but we know all of that is just make believe. The last thing the prince of this world wants is that you would see that behind everything that happens in our material world a spiritual battle is being played out. Events in our world are manipulated and used as part of the war there. If our eyes could be opened for a moment we would be shocked at what is going on.

Last fall while on vacation Laurie and I stayed a few days in the best hotel I've ever stayed in. This place is a gorgeous resort. There are rich woods everywhere, beautiful molding in the rooms. Everything is done just right. I was struck by an interesting contrast though. Our room was out on the edge of the resort very close to the tennis courts. Near our room was a back exit to a stair well. We could go down those stairs to an exterior door and

come out right by the tennis courts. So we used those stairs every day to go play tennis. But that stairwell made an interesting contrast to the rest of the resort. In that stair well we encountered bare gray concrete, metal stair rails and pipes. It was downright ugly. It hit me that this is what that building really is. They put wood, paint and floor coverings on the inside to keep you from seeing the ugliness of what's really there. Behind everything that happens in this world there is something going on in the spiritual realm that you can't see, but it is the reality. And that reality is that the prince of this world is doing everything he can to disintegrate your life.

### THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD HAD NOTHING ON JESUS

In John 14:30 Jesus said of Satan, "he has no hold on me." Literally the Greek text says "he has nothing in me." This was an ancient idiom that meant "he has no power over me." Jesus then said, "The world must learn that I love the Father and I do exactly what my Father has commanded me." The events that were about to transpire weren't happening because Jesus had failed or because Satan had won. They happened because Jesus was carrying out the Father's plan to rescue the human race and this was the only way to do it. It was all according to the plan.

In John 19:10 when Jesus was on trial before Pilate he had refused to answer some of the Roman's questions. Pilate said, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus responded in verse 11, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." That's the same message. Pilate was only able to do what the Father allowed him to do in order to accomplish the Father's plan.

Jesus trembled at what he was about to experience. Later that night he would talk to the Father and ask if there were not some other way. But he was committed to do what was necessary. And he was totally confident that this was all according to plan. Satan could do nothing to Jesus unless the Father allowed him to, and Jesus knew it. So Satan would do his worst and to his total shock and dismay would find that all he had done was accomplish exactly what the Father wanted. What he thought was his biggest victory was in fact his worst defeat.

There is an enormous lesson for us in this. Satan still has no hold on Jesus. Because the Spirit of Jesus is in us that means he also has no power over us. 1 John 4:4 says, "the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world." Remember the familiar scene in *The Wizard of Oz* where Dorothy, the Tin Man, the Lion and the Scarecrow are in the chamber where they are having an audience with the great and intimidating Wizard of Oz. It is a scary scene. Lights flash and the wizard's commanding voice thunders out demands and threats. He says, "The great Oz has spoken!" The four are scared out of their wits by the awesome display, but then they catch a glimpse of a small balding man behind a curtain. They pull it back and discover that the thunderous voice comes from

this unprepossessing man speaking into a microphone. He is nothing scary. He's just a man, and not even a very impressive one. Realizing he has been seen he says, "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain." But it's too late. They see him for what he is and say "You're just a humbug." That is what we need to realize. Satan is the man behind the curtain.

Satan is more than a humbug. He is quite real and dangerous. He is powerful. But he has no power over the one who is in us. He can bluster and threaten all he wants, but we do not need to fear him. The life of Jesus shows that he can try to wreak all the havoc he wants but all he will accomplish is to do what the Father wants to happen.

Yes, but he has done some terrible things to God's people. Just ask Job. In his attempts to discourage and defeat people he has done horrendous things that have destroyed the faith of some, and even their entire lives. Doesn't it seem like he is able to do damage to people that is very real? Why would God allow that?

I don't have a pat answer to that question but there are some thoughts that can help us. Remember that it is often the hard and painful things that build us up. "That which does not kill me makes me stronger."

Have you seen any of the demotivational posters made by Despair Inc.? I really like them. They look like typical motivational posters with a big beautiful picture and a large word stating the theme, plus a saying about that theme in smaller font underneath. The difference is their sayings are funny and far from motivating. One poster says, "Motivation: If a pretty poster and a cute saying are all that it takes to motivate you, you probably have a very easy job. The kind robots will be doing soon." Two that are pertinent here are these: "Pressure: It can turn a lump of coal into a flawless diamond, or an average person into a perfect basket case." "Adversity: That which does not kill me postpones the inevitable."

So yes, we know the cliché, yet there is truth in it. Yale professor Shane Frederick has created a test called the Cognitive Reflection Test. It only has three questions yet it is an accurate measure of intelligence. It has results comparable to much more extensive tests. Two psychologists, Adam Alter and Daniel Oppenheimer, gave the test to students at Princeton University a few years ago and they averaged 1.9 correct answers out of 3. That's pretty good since the best average scores on the test were recorded at MIT where the students got 2.18 correct. Then the researchers printed the test in a light gray font that was only a 10 point italic so it was really hard to read. This time when they gave the test to students at the same school they averaged 2.45 correct answers. Just by making the test questions harder to read they improved the students' score. The difficulty in reading the questions caused the students to focus and pay more careful attention, to use their minds more effectively. The obstacle enabled them to perform better!

No one would ever want to be dyslexic or to have their children have to deal with that problem. But here's an interesting little fact you probably don't know. In his book, *David and Goliath*, Malcolm Gladwell reports "an extraordinarily high number of successful entrepreneurs are dyslexic. A recent study by Julie Logan at the City University of London puts the number somewhere around a third." Richard Branson of Virgin Group, Charles Schwab, David Neeleman, founder of JetBlue, John Chambers CEO of Cisco, Paul Orfalea, founder of Kinko's are all dyslexic. Neuroscientist Sharon Thompson Schill spoke at a meeting of prominent university donors and asked how many of them had been diagnosed with a learning disorder. She said, "Half the hands went up, it was unbelievable." Overcoming hardships apparently was a big component of their success.

The Scripture tells us this is at work in our lives as well. God allows Satan to do his malicious mischief in our lives at times because the process makes us stronger and can draw us closer to God. We also know from the book of Job that God may be using our faithfulness in the face of what should be demoralizing hardships to actually bring him glory, to encourage other people, to draw them to him and to be a demonstration to the spiritual realm.

## IMPLICATIONS

### PAY ATTENTION TO THE INTELLIGENCE

The military knows in combat it is crucial to have some idea of what the enemy is doing. If one does not pay attention to the intelligence and act on it a repeat of the Pearl Harbor attack may well occur. In his book, *More Than Courage*, Harold Coyle wrote, "Knowing where your enemy is and what he is doing are perhaps the most important elements of warfare." We should not be victims of surprise attacks. We've been given plenty of intel about our enemy and what he is up to. In this passage Jesus warned us that he is coming and he is going to attack. How is he going to attack us? He is going to try to do three things mainly:

The most obvious is he is going to *tempt* us. He is going to tell us there is something God hasn't given us that we absolutely must have. Hey, Eve, look at this piece of fruit. Is this the most delicious looking thing you've ever laid eyes on or what? Do you have any idea of how good this is? If you eat this you'll have all you've ever dreamed of. Make the whole goal of your life to achieve success in your chosen field of endeavor because if you do then you'll have all you ever dreamed of. You need a more satisfying marriage to be happy, so ditch this loser of a spouse of yours and go find the happiness you deserve. Have sex with this person you're not married to because, hey, everybody is doing it and you know you want it. Go ahead and look at that pornography because it won't hurt anybody. Use this new drug or that alcohol because you need to feel better.

I have mentioned that I've recently been talking with a friend in ministry who has been treated unfairly and unkindly by others he has served with. In order to justify some of the things these brothers in Christ have done they have been making some subtly disparaging and untrue remarks about him. The enemy has been whispering to him that he needs to fight fire with fire. He needs to start slinging some of that mud right back at them and tell people the truth. He has been hearing, "You need to justify and vindicate yourself!" The urge to do so has been almost overpowering. But he recognized what has been going on there is the enemy is at work. The enemy is trying to tempt him, dangling some bait in front of him. He sees what is happening and knows if he bites everyone will lose, including him.

Another enemy tactic that we need to recognize is ***discouragement***. This is one of the enemy's favorites. He wants to fill your life with hurts, obstacles, hardships and disappointments so that you finally get so down you just give up and become bitter and resentful. This was his tactic with Job. Take his children, take his crops, take his animals, take his health until he's got nothing left but to curse God.

The enemy wants to turn you into a person who is cynical and negative about everything, critical of everything and everyone because you've been let down, disappointed and hurt by people who have failed or betrayed you. Especially the enemy wants you to think that God has failed you and to become cynical about him. I was taking a shower recently and noticed the directions on the shampoo bottle. Work the shampoo into your scalp, rinse, then repeat. The thought hit me, I'll bet they say repeat because they just want me to use more shampoo so they can sell me more. Where else do you have to repeat? The toothpaste maker doesn't tell me to brush my teeth with toothpaste, rinse, then repeat. When we run the dishwasher we don't have to repeat it. When I drain the oil in my car and replace it I don't have to immediately repeat the process. Do I really need to repeat the shampoo process? How do I know if that's really necessary? I could ask the hair experts at the place where I get my hair cut, but they sell shampoo. They could be part of the shampoo conspiracy. I realized I was being awfully cynical about this, but doesn't it seem that life just naturally goes that way? That's what Satan wants. He wants me to think I can't trust anyone, but especially God.

One difficulty is that we will go through hardships that we don't understand. If we can see some point to them they are easier to take, but Satan delights in bringing discouragements and hardships into our lives that produce no discernible positive result. I recently recalled a day that happened quite a few years ago when I was under a lot of pressure. I had a ton of things I had to get done and was facing some harsh deadlines. The whole week had been a steady series of "Murphy's Law" incidents. Everything I did seemed to go wrong and it culminated in a day late in the week. That day I had to take some time out to drive up to Oceanside to have an x-ray of my knee, which had been giving me trouble. When I got to the office I had been told to go to for the test they



informed me I was at the wrong place. The correct office was not far away, but by the time I drove there and went in I was late for the appointment. They said, "You are too late and will have to reschedule." I objected that it wasn't my fault, that their people had sent me to the wrong office. It didn't matter. I had just spent 40 minutes driving around and dealing with their people for no purpose on a day when I really needed that time. Frustrated I got in my car to drive home having wasted precious time I couldn't afford. As I was passing the Carlsbad mall my car's engine suddenly quit. I coasted into the parking lot and tried to get it to start again to no avail. At this point I just prayed. "Lord, I don't have time for this. Could you please help me to just deal with this and get back to my work?" This was before the cell phone epidemic had hit my house and I didn't have one. I knew that there were pay phones (for you younger people ask your parents what those are) in the mall. So I headed into the mall planning to call Laurie so she could come to my aid. When I got into the mall the Lord answered my prayer. I ran into some friends from our church. When I explained my situation they said they could help. They had a cell phone we could use to call Laurie. Unfortunately no matter what they did they couldn't get a signal on their cell phone. No worries, I told them I would find a pay phone and call her. They said, "Are you sure? We don't want to leave you stranded?" It wasn't a problem. Laurie was home so she could come get me. I found a pay phone and called home, and there was no answer. I thought maybe Laurie was just outside for a moment. I waited several minutes and tried again. No answer. I waited for 15 minutes and tried again. Still no answer. By this time my frustration level was through the roof. I was pretty unhappy with the Lord as well. Not knowing what else to do I trudged back out to the idiot car, grumbling and complaining to the Lord all the way. "Are you really there, Lord? What is the point of this fruitless exercise? Can you not help? Do you not care or are you just unable to do anything?" I got out to the car and not knowing what else to do tried it again. It started right up and I drove home with no problem. I never did find out what went wrong with the car or what that frustrating episode was all about. It will remain a mystery until eternity arrives.

Why do things like that happen? I have no idea. And that was just a tiny little incident of delay and frustration. I can think of a friend who was in ministry and got fired because his boss wanted the church to go in a different direction. The poor guy spent the next 3 years doing everything he could to find another job, any kind of job that would enable him to support his family. He got nothing but closed doors. This was a guy who loved God. Wow, did he get beaten down. The enemy will try to destroy you with discouragement, hardship, loss and disappointment.

## OVERCOME THE ATTACKS

In 1 John 5:4-5 John wrote, "Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." I like the Greek word translated "overcome." It is *nikao*. The noun form of it means "victory." It has a symbol you would

immediately recognize today. The noun form is nike, symbolized by the swoosh. If you are born of God you have the victory. You are here to overcome the world and the nasty guy behind it - Satan himself.

We can overcome the world, Satan's system. We can overcome the attacks of the enemy. How do we do that? By faith in Jesus. It is believing in Jesus that is the victory. It is believing that when Satan comes like he did in Jesus' life he may and will wreak havoc, but in the end God still has a plan. What seems to be God's biggest defeat and Satan's biggest victory, is in fact God's big win and Satan's humiliation.

Satan is going to attack us. He is coming. He will come today in some form in your life. He will try to beat you up, he will try to lure you away with some shiny thing that is an illusion, he will try to force you into the world's mold. In all these things we need to believe in Jesus. When those hard things come, when we don't see how God could allow them in our lives if he loves us at all, we need to keep believing in Jesus. When we are tempted to think if only we could gain this honor, or that promotion, or if those people could notice us and give us their applause, then we would be happy and at peace, at those times we need to believe in Jesus. We need to believe that what he gives us is enough.

We have the opportunity to defeat Satan. The key is to keep believing in Jesus. It is trusting in God's goodness, his wisdom and his love and grace. It comes from believing that being faithful to him will bring greater rewards than anything our world has to offer. We need to keep believing that Satan has no power over the one who is in us, and that God has a plan that will always defeat Satan.

But it is important that we remember we are going to have to have something bigger than ourselves to live for. Jesus said we must deny ourselves to find life. We must live for God's glory and his will in our lives no matter what. If we live only for our own comfort, God's plan will not matter to us. We must make God's glory the thing we live for, then keep believing that he will work out our circumstances both for our good and his glory.