

Wizard of Oz clip...Isn't it amazing what a little information can do for your confidence? Dorothy and her friends were scared to death by the "great and powerful Oz" until little Toto pulled back the curtain. You saw their fear give way to bold confidence once they knew the truth about the Wizard. Today I want to pull back the curtain. I want to expose the enemy of our souls. I'll warn you in advance that we will not discover some impotent old man who couldn't hurt a flea, far from it. Satan is a formidable foe. But if we know the truth about who he is and what he is up to, we can overcome our fears and gain confidence in God's strategy to foil his evil intentions. Life is hard enough without the added burden of living in the dark about the devil.

Life is hard. The reason is because we were born on a battleground in the middle of an invisible war. The Bible presents a worldview that acknowledges two worlds, a world above and a world below. The world above is invisible or spiritual. The world below is visible or physical. Everything visible and physical is controlled by things that are invisible and spiritual. That worldview is not exclusive to Christianity. Just about every culture in the world believes that. Meanwhile a naturalistic or scientific worldview dominates our country. If you embrace materialism then matter is all that matters. Spiritual beings in an invisible world don't exist. Satan, the devil, Lucifer, the prince of darkness, the evil one, the tempter is merely the product of an active religious imagination.

But the Bible teaches otherwise. And it is the Bible that tells about a great cosmic conflict that is the source of so much pain and suffering. Today as we pull back the curtain, some things will remain a mystery. Satan's origin is vague, his fall is sketchy but his goal is clear - to oppose Christ and anyone who follows Christ. But there are a few things that we need to know.

One of the greatest military strategists of all time, Sun Tzu, famously said, "If you know your enemies and know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles." Every successful general in world history understands the importance of knowing the enemy. You cannot survive in a battle if you do not know who your enemy is, what personnel and equipment you are fighting against as well as the enemy's strengths, weaknesses, goals and purpose for fighting. So this morning let's see what the Bible tells us about our enemy.

Our enemy is invisible. "For our struggle is not against ^bflesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly places." Eph. 6:12. All conflict upon this earth is just a symptom of an invisible war that began long before we ever arrived on the earth. "Earthly warfare is... but a faint, ugly reflection of the real thing. It is into the real war that the Christian is to plunge. Wars on earth are but tremors felt from an earthquake light years away. The Christian's war takes place at the epicenter of the earthquake. It is infinitely more deadly while the issues that hang on it make earth's most momentous question no more than village gossip." The Fight, John White

Conventional weapons have no effect upon an invisible enemy. We must learn to fight with the weapons God has provided. "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds." 2 Cor. 10:3-4

In the weeks ahead we will discuss how to use the weapons God provides us.

Our enemy is powerful. This world is controlled by "the prince of the power of the air." "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." (Eph. 2:1-2). Have you ever sung the hymn, "This is my father's world?" Well, it is and it isn't. This world rightfully belongs to the Creator but it is temporarily under the authority of Satan. When God created Adam and Eve He delegated His authority. "Be fruitful and multiply and rule over the earth." When Adam and Eve rejected God's authority (that's called sin), they abdicated their authority to the devil. Satan turned God's authority upside down from God-husband-wife-serpent to serpent-wife-husband-God. There are two kingdoms, two kings, two seats of government or authority - God's and Satan's. These kingdoms are in conflict. That is why there is so much chaos and everything tends toward disorder. John says, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

It is important to recognize the distinction between **Satan's active influence and his passive influence**. His active influence in the form of demon possession and direct intervention is rare in our culture. In fact, the kind of demonic activity we see in Ephesus in Acts 19 is prevalent during three basic time periods in history - the Exodus, the ministry of Elijah/Elisha, and during the ministry of Jesus and the disciples. Interest in the occult invites demonic influence. It is his passive influence that impacts us daily. Everything tends toward disorder; from gardens to nations, even marriages. Satan controls the environment. In this great battle there is no neutral ground. Ever since Adam and Eve declared their independence from God mankind has reaped the disastrous consequences of these kingdoms in conflict. The myth of neutrality is just that - a myth. You are either under the influence of God or Satan.

Our enemy is malicious. Even though people today are no different than those in Paul's day with respect to a belief in the supernatural, the difference is that people in Paul's day feared the spirits. People in our day assume the spirits are well disposed toward us and eager to help. So people go to palm readers and fortune tellers or mediums in order to reach out for help to the unseen world. Satan is our enemy. He may come to you as a friend but that is all part of the ruse.

Jesus described the objective of the evil one this way; "The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly." John 10:10. What God owns, the devil wants to steal, what God builds the devil wants to destroy, where God gives life the devil wants to snuff it out. He is relentless in His pursuit. Peter says he, "prowls around like a roaring hungry lion seeking whom he may devour." 1 Pe. 5:8. Like a lion going after its prey, Satan chooses his victim and then seeks to separate him/her from the rest of the group.

God's ultimate purpose is explained in Eph. 1:9-10, "Making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." Satan's purpose is to oppose God's plan by dividing and disintegrating. He incites racial division, divorce, church splits and even personal confusion. The word "anxiety" = merimnao - which means to divide the mind. It describes a mind drawn in opposite directions or "divided into parts" (A. T. Robertson). The devil wants to keep us confused, in a state of constant anxiety.

Our enemy is crafty. 2 Cor. 11:3 says, "But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." The word "crafty" is a neutral term which is often used in classical Greek literature in a good sense to describe someone who is wise or skillful. When it comes to evil there is no more skillful practitioner than the devil.

How does the devil influence us? One of his most effective ways is through the power of the lie. He specializes in deception. "All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near." Sun Tzu

Satan uses the various domains on earth to promote false information. Entertainment, education, politics, the media, even religion, all these delivery systems are employed by the devil to distort the truth. In Paul's culture Satan operated out in the open. In our culture he operates behind the scenes. Dozens of TV programs and movies today feature the paranormal making it seem like this subject is really great for entertainment purposes but it is not real. You don't have to look far to find people who take the paranormal very seriously. Within 10 miles of our church there are three Wiccan groups one of which has 519 members, 9 shamanistic groups, 16 psychic groups and 11 atheist groups.

Satan's craftiness calls for God's people to be crafty ourselves. Jesus said, "be as wise as serpents." It is not uncommon for Christian people to picture the devil with horns and a pitchfork. Is it possible that while we are mounting a crusade against Halloween costumes Satan holds Christian people captive at the mall? The devil doesn't wear a red suit and carry a pitchfork. He might appear in a business suit or a helmet and shoulder pads. He may gain entry by illegal drug use, the word "pharmakeia" is translated sorcery. But while we are waging a war on drugs he may come in the back door through the avalanche of prescription medication in our culture. If I were the devil, I would love to see people going after a caricature of me and miss the real deal.

Our enemy is organized. Eph. 6:11 speaks of "the schemes (methodeia) of the devil." He has a method, a strategy and he is organized. These schemes are designed to cripple believers and undermine our effectiveness for Christ. The very next verse, 6:12, mentions, "rulers...powers...and world forces of darkness," indicating that there is an organization of evil raised up against God. We don't get much information about it in the scriptures but we know it is not random. So next week we will talk about how the devil attacks us and can render us ineffective but let's conclude with two important reminders:

1. Satan is a defeated foe. John says, "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." 1 Jn. 3:8. Col. 2:15 says that on the cross Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." Martin Luther wrote, "we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him."

If he knows he is defeated, why does He still fight? It is his nature. A scorpion and a frog meet on the bank of a stream and the scorpion asks the frog to carry him across on its back. The frog asks, "How do I know you won't sting me?" The scorpion says, "Because if I do, I will die too." The frog is satisfied, and they set out, but in midstream, the scorpion stings the frog. The frog feels the onset of paralysis and starts to sink, knowing they both will drown, but has just enough time to gasp "Why?" Replies the scorpion: "Its my nature..."

2. God created the devil to the praise of the glory of His grace. That expression is found three times in the opening verses of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He wants them to know that God's ultimate goal is His glory. So why does He allow evil? Why does He tolerate the tarnishing of His glory by the devil? Why doesn't He just put an end to the devil, not in the future but now?

Because God's glory shines brightest against the dark backdrop of sin and evil. If we knew nothing of evil, then we would not appreciate the goodness of God. If we had never sinned, we would not appreciate forgiveness. God's plan for solving our sin problem reveals His glory. His willingness to forgive our sin reveals His grace. And in the end, the last state of the believer is better than the first. That is the good news of the gospel. God takes what we have ruined by sin and makes it far better, through His Son. You cannot ruin your life beyond God's ability to redeem it. God's grace is always greater than your sin. The only appropriate response to such grace is to humbly bow before our rightful king because, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." James 4:6-8