

**Sermon preached by Mr. Nathanael de Poix at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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**KNOW YOUR ENEMY
SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

1 Peter 5:8

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

What comes to mind when you think of spiritual warfare? What pops into your head when I speak of the devil?

For some, spiritual warfare is just a lot of superstition. To many, the devil is nothing more than a guy in a red suit with horns, a pointy tail, and a pitch fork – that you too can be for Halloween – if you shell out 15 bucks for the outfit.

There's even a TV show airing right now called Reaper. Heard of it? I came across it a few weeks ago while channel-surfing. Not knowing what it was, I turned to it and then proceeded to waste about three minutes of my life that I'll never get back.

Without wanting to waste your time, here's the gist of the show: Satan is working out deals with humans on earth to capture escaped souls from hell that have returned to earth with extraordinary powers. Which they presumably picked up in hell.

In other words, Satan and hell are just one big joke. It scares me that the devil has tricked the world into believing he's just a figment of the imagination. No more real than the Easter Bunny.

Then there's the darker side of spiritual warfare. There are cults such as the Wiccans, who practice witchcraft and sorcery attempting to resurrect ancient gods and goddesses – and who also happen to hold tax-exempt status and are protected by law in this country. For Wicca has been recognized in the United States as a legitimate religion. It is my understanding that the Wiccans are blind to *who* they are actually worshiping.

Even still more heinous, are those who knowingly worship the devil himself.

In Christian circles, there's quite the variety in how we view the enemy and spiritual warfare. Some Christians blame Satan for every bad thing that happens to them. As if every illness and inadequacy in their life is a result of Satan's handiwork.

Still, we have another group: There are Christians who actually deny the devil's very existence. I find it difficult to grasp myself, that people out there call on Jesus Christ as their Savior, believe in heaven and hell, even claim to believe in the authority of Scripture, but refuse to believe that Satan is real. Consequently, they refuse to believe that there is an actual all-out war going on 24-7 between Satan's dark forces and God's holy camp.

To quote C.S. Lewis:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which we can fall regarding Satan and his demons. One is to disbelieve in their existence; the other is to have an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. Satan is equally pleased with both.

I used to serve in ministry alongside a high school football coach. But this was not your ordinary, typical coach. Bill had bleach-white hair, could have retired from work years ago but enjoyed it too much, was soft-spoken on and off the field, and had a servant's heart.

But there was another side to Bill that many were unaware of. Bill had a fiery passion to see young people excel. Bill had two high school football state championship titles under his belt. He came into my office one day with a cut over his eye and a bruise on his cheek. I asked him, "Bill, what happened?"

He replied, "The new crop of guys were hitting like sissies." So Bill put down the clipboard and got on the line of scrimmage in his t-shirt and sweatpants. He went up against fully-padded high school athletes a quarter of his age with greater strength and agility for the rest of the afternoon. Looking at those two tiny marks on his face and with the grin Bill was sporting, I admit I felt a little sorry for the ego-blow he delivered to those high school guys. There's a pride-buster if I've ever heard of one.

But Bill knew what it takes to win in battle. It was no secret that God was first in Bill's life. He also went above and beyond to prepare his teams for game time.

Bill was somewhat of the lead coach in the district, and organized game-tape swapping with the other district coaches. The purpose of the swap was so that each team could get a glimpse of their rival for Friday night's game. But Bill didn't just review the games. He viewed them over and over again.

By the time Bill and his football team were ready to take the field, they had spent hours – sometimes days – reviewing and analyzing the other team's strategies. They knew exactly what to expect and were ready for battle.

We too, friends, are in battle with a real-life enemy that wants nothing more than to see us fall. In order for us to prevail against these forces of evil, we need to be like Bill and his football team: We must come prepared. We must *know our enemy*.

The Bible has much to say about the devil, and today we are only going to scratch the surface. Consider this the first installment in a series, to be continued the next time I have the opportunity to come before you.

If you want to take this study further, I'll be reading or referencing over 50 verses from the Bible today. Don't bother trying to get them all down. This sermon script will be available and waiting for you to pick up next Sunday just behind you in the narthex.

But, before we go any further, I want you to know where I'll be coming from this morning.

(1.) SATAN IS REAL AND AT WORK IN *THIS* WORLD.

1 Peter 5:8 is foundational in understanding the devil. It's a wake-up call to Christians:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

It doesn't get more clear than that. This verse tells us that Satan isn't hiding out in a den in hell, he's up here in our midst, just waiting for any and every opportune moment to unleash havoc in your life. Peter is telling us to be vigilant in awareness regarding the evil one's tactics. Peter's saying, watch out! Your adversary, the devil, is just waiting to pounce!

Satan is referred to more than 250 separate times in the New Testament alone! That averages out to about once in every single chapter.

He's getting much more than mere honorable mention in the Bible. God provides us with Satan's resume and says, "Here's the devil's M.O. He gets to God's people like this. He will be coming at you like that." Guard yourself! Watch out! *Know your enemy!*

Satan doesn't want to just bring a little pain and hurt into your life, he wants to ravenously consume you! He wants to destroy everything that is good: Your marriage, your friendships, your family, your career – he wants to ruin it all.

The Bible calls the devil by a variety of names. He is most commonly referred to as Satan, meaning adversary, 47 times. He is also referred to as the devil 32 times; translated as slanderer. From there, the list is long. *Some* of his aliases are:

- the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15)
- the ruler of darkness (Ephesians 6:12)
- the prince of this world (John 16:11)
- Lucifer – *meaning light bearer, shining one* (Isaiah 14:12 [KJV])
- the dragon (multiple times in Revelation 12)
- Belial – *as in vileness, ruthlessness* (2 Corinthians 6:15)
- the deceiver (Revelation 20:10)
- the accuser (Revelation 12:10)
- Beelzebub – *or prince of demons* (Matthew 12:24)
- the tempter, a liar, a murderer, the evil one, the enemy, and the list goes on..

These verses are vital in understanding the nature of Satan. Not...a...good...guy...

Just weeks ago Pastor Bob reminded us that "Jesus is the unseen guest at every meal". And Amen for that. But we also need to remember there's another guest at the table. Just as the evil forces were in possession of Judas at the Last Supper in the very presence of Jesus, so these unrelenting dark forces are with us even now. You see,

(2.) SATAN HATES JESUS AND HIS FOLLOWERS.

In Revelation 12, verses 4-5, we are given a description of our adversary's passionate hatred for Jesus:

His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the

moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

In this passage from John's revelation, the veil is pulled back in the spiritual realms. We are taken from the visible to the invisible.

Theologians offer four different views as to whom the woman symbolizes. Where they diverge is not as critical as where they converge for our purposes today: theologians overwhelmingly agree that the "seed" or "son" to be consumed by this dragon – the devil – is none other than the Christ-child.

Now I'm going to skip down to verses 7-9 for more Biblical evidence to support the view that Satan and his dark angels despise Jesus and his children.

And there was war in heaven.. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven.. The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

Here we are told that there was war in heaven: the devil and his armies against God's loyal angels. Overpowered by the holy angelic regime, Satan is cast down to earth along with his fellow demons. 2 Peter 2:4 confirms this in declaring that God did not spare these angels when they sinned, but that they were cast down. See Isaiah 14:12 & Ezekiel 28:11 for prophetic messages regarding Satan's fall.

The closing verse of Revelation 12 says *Satan went off to wage war...[with] those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

You see Satan *hates* Jesus Christ. He despises everything about our Savior. And what do you do when you can't get to the person you're trying to hurt? You go after those closest to them.

For the time being, until Jesus returns, Satan is actively pursuing us. And he's going to use every dirty trick he can to tear down and destroy those of us who cling to Jesus.

Some of you might be wondering, "How *does* Satan get to us?" You ready?

Here are just *some* of the ways in which Satan is at work in our lives as told to us in the Bible. I'm going to rattle these off quickly:

- he has his dark angels to help (Revelation 12:7)
- he has his own ministers (2 Corinthians 11:15)
- he performs his own miracles (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Matthew 7:21-23)
- he instigates false doctrine (1 Timothy 4:1-3)
- he perverts the Word of God (Genesis 3:1-4)
- he hinders the works of God's servants (1 Thessalonians 2:18)
- he blinds men from the truth (2 Corinthians 4:4)
- he accuses Christians before God (Job 1 & 2; Zechariah 3:1-4; Revelation 12:10)
- he lays snares for men (2 Timothy 2:26; 1 Tim 3:7)
- he tempts (Matthew 4:1; Ephesians 6:11)
- he afflicts (this one's all too common in Scripture, but here's a couple: Job 2:7; Acts 10:38)

- he deceives (Revelation 12:9)
- he undermines the sanctity of the home (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)
- he prompts both saints and sinners to transgress against a Holy God (also found multiple times in Scripture: check 1 Chronicles 21:1; John 13:2)

Satan and his fallen angels are busy! And they are doing everything they can to ensnare you in their evil schemes.

Each one of the devil's activities I just mentioned could be a sermon all by itself as I'm sure there isn't a soul here that hasn't fallen victim to a number of these schemes.

What's Satan been whispering in your ear? Has the Accuser filled your head with any of the following thoughts?

- It's *not* that your job is more important than your family. You work extra long days and weeks so that they can live a nice life. There's nothing wrong with being successful. Once you retire, you'll have plenty of time to catch-up.
- You have no place in church. Who do you think you are sitting in that pew? You're a sinner.
- Remember that thing you did? What if people found out? You'd be ruined.
- You can't kick that addiction. You're too weak. Just hide it.
- See that Christian over there? Just be thankful you're not like him.
- You don't have to apologize for that outburst. Clearly, *they* were in the wrong.
- Hey, what you're doing behind closed doors isn't really hurting anyone.
- You're not really saved – because if you were you wouldn't have those desires. You wouldn't act like that.

Do any of these sound familiar? Well congratulations my friends. You're caught in the midst of a supernatural battle going on between the forces of good and evil.

For the past four weeks, I've been filled with the notion that a youth director with minimum credentials has little-to-no business standing before a congregation and preaching God's Word.

So now you're at the point where you're probably like, "WOW! This a real downer. I came in this morning expecting my subsequent 'He is risen' sermon, haven't even had my coffee yet, and now I'm at war? C'mon Nathanael, could you ease up a bit?"

No friends, I can't. I love you too much to downplay spiritual warfare and its ever-present, yet subtle, effects on your lives.

Nevertheless, it is time to shift our focus to Jesus and his role in this ongoing battle between good and evil...for

(3.) JESUS HAS OVERCOME SATAN AND SET US FREE.

You might be thinking, "Well how do *I* know that? Is Jesus *really* going to win in the end? And are we really free from the devil's clutches?"

First, make no mistake friends: Satan and God are not equals.

I think some of us have this picture that it's *God vs. Satan* – like the two are on a level playing field. *Who's got the edge? Who's having a better game?*

I came up with an illustration for you that doesn't even do justice to just how much more powerful the Lord of the universe is when compared to Satan. But here's my feeble attempt:

I picture the devil as a young child. No more than 5 years old in attitude and maturity. *Sounds about right...* Still able to lie, deceive, and bring heartache to his family. Nevertheless, imagine this child's limited intelligence and strength matched up to that of his parents. It's no question who's in control.

Colossians 1:16 leaves no room for confusion: the devil and his angels are created, finite beings. Our God is the Creator and supreme ruler over all that has been made, and will be made.

1 John brings us further comfort with these words:

You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Second, the Bible tells us that one day the devil will be cast down into the lake of burning sulfur for all eternity (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10).

Our third and final piece of irrefutable Biblical evidence to support the defeat of Satan and his dark forces is this: *It's already happened* – as in past tense. Jesus has *already* defeated Satan and liberated us from the chains of the evil one.

How do we know this? Let's get back to the Word:

Referring back to Revelation 12, God overpowers Satan's attempt to destroy Jesus and spares His Son. Verse five tells us that this *male child* – Jesus – *will rule the nations with an iron scepter*.

This was also foretold of Jesus in Psalm 2:9:

*You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.*

Just in case there's any question as to God's purpose in sending His Son to the Cross, 1 John 3:8(b) says:

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

Any questions?

On the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus is recorded in John 12:31 saying:

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world – the devil – will be driven out.

Jumping four chapters ahead to John 16 verse 11, Jesus still in His last hours before going to the Cross, again speaks of the defeat of Satan when He says:

because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Friends, Satan is a defeated foe. We just heard from the Bible – the Word of God – that it was one of the purposes for which God sent Jesus to this earth. And this purpose was accomplished in full. Satan was defeated at the Cross and in the resurrection of our Savior! *Amen?*

What *was* the darkest day in history, turned into the greatest triumph for all of those who were to be given *new life* in Christ Jesus. For it was at the Cross that Jesus set millions of us that were formally captive to the bondages of sin, free! *Amen?*

Revelation 12:11 says that those who follow Christ overcame the devil by *the blood of the Lamb*.

The lamb, Jesus Christ, overcame the evil forces at His birth, He resisted the devil's temptations in the desert, and He defeated death and the evil one on the Cross. You too share in these victories if you have given your life over to Jesus Christ.

If Jesus Christ is your real and personal Savior, you too:

- have victory over sin;
- are triumphant over the devil and his minions;
- and are therefore, ultimately free from the devil's accusations and tactics.

But the devil is still dangerous.

As John Piper has vividly put it:

The death of Jesus was the decisive defeat of...the devil. And as Satan goes, so go all his fallen angels. All of them were dealt a decisive blow of defeat when Christ died. Not that they were put out of existence. We wrestle with them even now. But they are a defeated foe. We know we have the final victory. It is as though a great dragon has had his head cut off and is thrashing about until he bleeds to death. The battle is won. But we must still be careful of the damage he can do.

The devil is no match for King Jesus and his iron scepter.

If you're struggling with sin in a certain area in your life and you've come to believe it's more than you can bear, remember that's a lie straight from the devil. Take hold of that victory in Jesus your Savior.

Satan knows he's defeated. He knows his days are numbered. But he's not going down without a fight.

So now you're like "Nathanael, what difference does all this make in *my* life?"

Friends, be mindful that you have an adversary. A real, unseen enemy; whose primary objective is your destruction. Be watchful and aware of his schemes. But don't be fearful. Don't buy the lies. Don't listen to the accusations.

And most importantly, don't follow a defeated foe. Follow Jesus. By default everyone out there in this world is following one or the other.

To drive this point home even further:

*This is what the LORD says –
Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:
I am the first and I am the last;
apart from me there is no God (Isaiah 44:6).*

It will be costly following Jesus at times, but you will be free and stand triumphant with Jesus Christ as your Lord now, and in the end.

I want to close today with Scripture. For many of you this is a very familiar passage. As the Word of the Lord falls on your ears, I pray you hear this passage in context of the reality of spiritual warfare. And may you take hold of that *Victory in Jesus*. I'll be reading from Romans chapter 8, verses 33-39:

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.