

BEWARE: DEVIL ON THE PROWL 1 PETER 5:8-9

Several hundred years ago, in the Middle Ages, before television and football and movies and smart phones, the primary means of entertainment was the theater. Medieval people went to plays. Not surprisingly the plots of these plays revolved around the age old theme of good and evil—represented by a hero and a villain.

For reasons that we cannot understand in this day and age, the predictability of these stage performances never seemed to bother the audiences. In fact, they always looked forward to the entrance of the evil character in the drama, who was easy to identify because he wore the same costume in every play. He had a red suit with a tail protruding from the rear, horns on his head, cloven hooves over his feet, and he carried a pitchfork in his hands.

He was such a comical looking figure that he became a sort of audience pleaser. Whenever he would appear on the stage, people would roar with laughter or break out in applause.

That is how the standard caricature of the devil came to be. You still see it in books or dramas or every Halloween ringing your doorbell. And most people, by and large, are still amused by it. Few take it seriously, nor should they.

But it raises a couple of questions. What is *your* concept of the devil? And how seriously do you take him? Oh I know. Talking about the devil is a little embarrassing for intellectually sophisticated people in the twenty first century. We're not supposed to believe in imaginary figures that have caused such needless psychological trauma to ignorant, superstitious people of days gone by.

But the question of what you think about the devil is an important one, not only in terms of your world view, but in how you live each day. I will tell you without hesitation that my belief system includes the devil and I take him very seriously. I believe that next to God and those whom God has delegated his authority he is the most powerful force in the world today. He controls more people, has authored more philosophies, sponsored more movements, started more conflicts, and influenced more behavior patterns than any human or natural force—by far. He is active, he is aggressive, he is cruel, he is clever, and he is out to get us!

And when I say “get us” I’m not talking about mere harassment as though he were some kind of big, bad bully who says a lot of mean things but can’t really do much harm. No. I’m talking about someone who wants to knock us senseless, someone who wants to hurt, cripple, maim, and put us completely out of commission.

But these are not just my opinions. I get these descriptions of the devil from the Bible, which portrays him as real, personal, and extremely dangerous. I also read in the Bible that we as God’s people are presently engaged in a very serious war with the devil and his minions—much more serious than any political war, because the stakes are a lot higher. It’s not over boundaries, ideologies, rights, or resources. It is a war between light and darkness, good and evil, truth and lies. It’s a clash between two kingdoms that are diametrically opposed to each other. And the stakes are the eternal souls of people who will either populate heaven or hell.

This morning we are going to look at a passage of Scripture that tells us how we are to take our stand against the devil. It’s found in **verse 8-9** of 1 Peter 5. *⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being*

experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (ESV).

It is interesting, and perhaps somewhat ironic, that Peter has just finished giving advice about what to do with the “cares” of this life—those fears, anxieties, and problems that all of us face at one time or another. He says very simply, “Throw them upon the Lord.” Let them go and let God have them. Why? Because He cares for us. He wants to bear our burdens for us not only because He can handle them, but because He loves us. He doesn’t want us to be bogged down with things that rob us of our joy and peace.

But Peter adds in the very next verse that trusting God with our cares doesn’t mean we should be careless. The Christian life is not a bed of roses. It’s more like a jungle—a jungle with wild beasts who add a dangerous dimension to this journey we call “the life of faith.”

Which is why Peter begins this section by saying, “*Be sober-minded and watchful.*” Mental alertness and preparedness is one of Peter’s favorite themes in this letter (c.f. 1:13; 4:7). And so he used these very words previously to exhort us to be vigilant with regard to temptation, prayer, and the Second Coming of Christ.

The first word, translated, “be sober-minded,” while often used to contrast to a state of inebriation, has a more general meaning of being in control of one’s thought processes as opposed to letting them be hijacked by influences that distort or skew one’s thinking.

The second word means, literally, “to stay awake,” but figuratively it has the idea of mental alertness and vigilance.

Peter is exhorting us to keep our minds engaged with and focused upon what is happening around us, particularly in the spiritual realm. Which is difficult because it is a realm that we cannot see. And because of that it is a realm of which we can easily be oblivious, or about which we can make a lot of false assumptions.

But we cannot afford to be ignorant or unaware. And that’s because, according to Peter, we are being stalked by a powerful spiritual adversary who is out to get us.

You say, “C’mon. Peter’s paranoid!”

No. It is not paranoia; it’s perspective. Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, knows that in reality—ultimate reality—there are invisible forces of evil, commandeered by Satan, that are opposed to God and everything related to Him. And since they cannot attack God directly, they will unleash their fury and frustration on those closest to Him—you and me. We are the sons and daughters of God, citizens of His kingdom, and that makes us the objects of their hatred and rage.

The devil is mad at us because we used to be on his side. According to Ephesians 2 we were once dead in our sins and controlled by Satan, who is called the prince of this world. But when God made us alive in Christ, we changed our allegiance. Colossians 1 says that we were transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light.

Which is great for us, but not for Satan. He’s a sore loser. And he would like nothing more than to make us sorry we ever heard about Jesus. He is going to vent his hatred and rage upon us, by trying to wound us with one or more of his spiritual arrows. He wants to inflict pain so that we will be distracted and discouraged. He wants to trip us up and make us fall by filling us with doubts or making us question God’s goodness so we become disillusioned with Him and the faith.

But there is something else. He knows, perhaps better than we know ourselves, that we are a serious threat to his kingdom. Because we are now Christian soldiers, and we have in our possession the weapon that will do the most serious damage to his kingdom. What is

it? *The gospel.* God has chosen *us* to invade the devil's territory with the liberating, life-transforming message of the gospel—the truth that will set other people free from his control.

And so the devil will try to do whatever it takes to shut us up, to keep us quiet, to render us ineffective and unproductive in spreading this good news. And he uses a number of tactics and methods, some of which we'll talk about this morning.

It is significant that Peter likens the devil to a roaring lion. There are some clues in that simile that are helpful in understanding his nature and methods. First, his nature.

Once, when we lived in Kenya, we went camping with the Hennighs in a game park called Massai Mara. The place where we set up camp was not a campground, just a pretty spot beneath a large acacia tree next to the Sand River, and there was no one else around for miles. When it got dark, we climbed to the top of the Hennigh's Land Rover and used their portable spotlight to see what was going on in the animal kingdom around us. In about a fifty yard radius of our camp we saw dozens of pairs of big yellow eyes—the eyes of hyena and cape buffalo, and who knows what else. Surrounding us...staring at us.

But those eyes were not nearly as frightening as the ominous sounds we heard coming from a greater distance away. The roar of lions. It was that sound that sent shivers up our spines.

If you have ever been to a zoo, have you ever noticed where the greatest concentration of people gather? It's not in front of the giraffe's pen, even though a giraffe is bigger and looks funnier and can run faster than a lion. It's not in front of the elephants' pen, even though elephants are enormous, and have that odd looking trunk coming out of the front of their faces.

Why do more people congregate around the lions? It's the *power*. Even at the time of Peter's writing the lion had been designated "king of beasts." That's because of those powerful paws that can kill small animals with a single swipe; those powerful claws that can seize its prey and shake them like a rag doll; those powerful jaws that can crush bones and skulls.

It's the *power*.

Peter is telling us that the devil, Satan, is powerful. Let's be clear: We are not fooling about with a creature in a red suit who is perfectly content to jab us on occasion with his pitchfork. We're not dealing with someone who's merely a nuisance. And yet I'm afraid some of us act as though our enemy were more like a pesky fly than a roaring lion.

We're dealing with an enemy that is capable of paralyzing us spiritually, destroying our testimony and our credibility, rendering us totally ineffective and unproductive for Jesus. He's done it with countless people in the past two thousand years, and we are all vulnerable.

But he's not only powerful, he's clever and cunning. I think that's what Peter means when he says, "the devil *prowls*..." Since a lion cannot outrun most of its prey, it outsmarts them. Most of their hunting is done under the cover of darkness. Usually they hide in tall, dense grass near a waterhole where they know an unsuspecting meal will sooner or later appear. And when that animal is looking the other way, or when it drops its guard—when it least expects an attack—suddenly the lion pounces.

And a lion is usually very patient and persistent. We used to live less than a mile from the border of the Nairobi Game Park. And we would occasionally venture in to see the animals. One day we saw a herd of zebra making their way to a watering hole. We also saw a lion in the tall grass, waiting for them, which they, obviously couldn't see. But they ventured

within fifty feet of where he was crouched and stayed there.

And we watched that lion for thirty minutes. His muscles were taught, his eyes were focused, his ears were pinned back, and on several occasions we could see that he was getting ready to pounce. But while we were there he never did.

Here's the point. Our enemy the devil is clever and cunning, and he is waiting, more patiently than we think, to catch us in a weak or vulnerable moment, when we least expect it, or when we have the least resistance. That is his strategy and we need to be prepared for that.

Let's talk about some ways in which he does that. He will take our unconfessed sin—sin that we harbor in our hearts and that we are either not *willing* to let go of, or have unconsciously or carelessly left unresolved, and he will use that sin to try and destroy us.

For example, he will take unconfessed anger or unresolved conflict and exploit it until it grows into resentment and eventually bitterness. Because he knows that a bitter person is spiritually paralyzed.

He will take unconfessed sexual fantasy, and exploit it until it turns into full-blown lust, and if he can, sexual addiction and other forms of immorality, and he can do it with remarkable ease.

He will take unconfessed pride—let's say pride in one's spiritual accomplishments—and turn it into self-righteousness and spiritual elitism, which does two very damaging things. It renders the person totally ineffective and it destroys the credibility and attractiveness of the gospel.

He will take unconfessed gossip and use it to destroy reputations and arouse suspicion and cause irreparable division.

I could go on and on. The point is, when you have unconfessed sin or unresolved conflict in your life, you have a very discernable spiritual weakness. You are spiritually unprotected in that area, and the enemy will focus in on that vulnerable spot and begin wreaking havoc in your life and lives of others.

Let me mention another way in which our enemy is clever and cunning. He will try to destroy us and our witness by diverting us from what is true and what is real. This has been such an effective strategy for him in our culture, with its many pleasures and opportunities and activities. He will divert us by attempting to shift our focus from Jesus to temporal things. Our homes and projects and hobbies and automobiles and televisions and vacations and sports and food and clothing. And he'll try to convince us that these things are so important that we ought to pour all our energies and affections into them. And he'll let those things make us feel good and important so that we'll want more and more.

But he'll also use the tactic of diversion in spiritual things. He doesn't mind if we study our Bibles if he can get us to be diverted by some minor theological point and turn it into a major issue, preferably a divisive issue, which takes our focus off of Christ's main purpose for His church and our lives. He doesn't mind if we all became Bible scholars and spent our whole lives trying to get all our theological "ducks" in a row. As long as it prevents us from proclaiming the simple gospel, he'll be satisfied.

Another of his methods is to make us spiritually dimwitted. He wants us to be oblivious to his presence or purpose, and to make us think that there really is no such thing as a devil or a spiritual conflict. He wants to convince us that sin is no big deal. He wants to convince us that it's okay for Christians to get nice and cozy with the world—to live like the world and to play the world's games. He wants to convince us that time spent with our heavenly Father

in His Word and fellowship is optional, or that committed participation in a local church is optional.

But these are lies from the father of lies.

There is yet another subtle tactic of the enemy that is implicit in the text. It is fear. Peter calls him a roaring lion. A lion roars in order to intimidate his prey. Satan wants us to be so scared of him that we won't think about him—we'll ignore him or pretend he doesn't exist. Or, on the other hand, he wants us to be so intimidated by his power that we think he's unstoppable and that we are spiritual peons and no match for him.

Either way, he wants to paralyze us with fear.

The point is, our enemy will exploit every one of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities in order to gain some kind of foothold in our lives. I can't say exactly what he'll do, because as soon as I think I've got him all figured out he'll do something else that I'm not expecting. All I know is that he's mean, cruel, heartless, and vicious.

The word "devour" in the text is the same word used in the Greek version of the OT to refer to Jonah being swallowed by the fish. Of course, the word devour corresponds to the simile of a lion, and so this is not literal. Peter simply wants us to know that the devil is out to get us.

But having said all of this, I want to make a statement, and please listen carefully. Yes, the devil is strong, yes he's clever and cunning, and, yes, he's out to get us. However, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, ***the devil is no match for you***. You *can* defeat him...every time.

Peter says in **verse 9**. Resist him. Don't miss the significance of that word. It means "to stand up against." But please be aware that the word was never used in the Greek language of *active* resistance—of hunting down your enemy. It is a term of *defense*.

Peter is describing a spiritual stand-off. He says the way to fight this powerful, vicious enemy is to face him squarely in the eye and stare him down. And he uses another word, "firm," to describe how we are able to stand our ground against him. Firm has the idea of securely and solidly planting one's feet so that they are immovable.

That firm footing is the key to our effectiveness in combat. We don't win spiritual battles by trying to outsmart the devil or by becoming expert tacticians in spiritual warfare. The devil yields no ground to our cleverness, our power, or our authority. He retreats only through the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

That is what is meant by "standing firm *in the faith*." "The faith" refers to our trust in and dependence upon Christ and all that He has done. It is the objective victory He accomplished on the cross through the shedding of His blood.

Listen to what the Scriptures say about this: "*For by [Jesus'] death he destroyed him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil...*" (Heb. 2:14). "*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross*" (Col. 2:15)

There is only one thing that intimidates Satan in this world. It is believers in Jesus Christ who stand in the victory He accomplished on the cross. And when we stand up to him by standing in the faith, he takes off and runs the other way.

The Apostle James, in the fourth chapter of his epistle says, "*Resist (same word) the devil and he will...*" What? "*...he will flee from you*" (James 4:7).

There's only one reason why someone flees. It's because they're scared. And Peter and James are saying that this great lion called the devil gets as nervous as a house cat

when confronted by Christ in us.

Do you know the security that is ours and the protection we have because we stand in Christ? The Apostle John says it clearly in his first letter, "*Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world*" (1 John 4:4). Satan is no match for Christ in us. Jesus' victory was decisive and that victory has been applied and appropriated to us. And that means when we stand up to him in the victory of Christ, the devil cowers and runs.

Do you believe that? If you don't then perhaps it's because you don't know how powerful Jesus is. Satan's power is not even on the same scale as his. Satan is a creature, Jesus is the Creator. Satan is finite and therefore has limitations, Jesus is infinite and has no limitations.

Aren't you glad you belong to Jesus? Aren't you glad that he has transferred you from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light?

Yes, we have a spiritual adversary that is on the prowl and is out to get us. Yes, he is powerful, cunning, and clever. And yes, we must be vigilant, because if we are not vigilant he will exploit our weaknesses and vulnerabilities to try and put us out of commission. That's part of the suffering we endure as Christians on this earth, suffering that are being experienced by our brothers and sisters all over the world.

But we do not ever have to be afraid or intimidated by the devil. He is a defeated and doomed foe. And ultimately, he will be completely vanquished and we will be completely vindicated. That's what Peter tells us in the following verses. **Verses 10-11.** *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

1 PETER 5:8-9

MAIN IDEA: WE SHOULD BE EXTREMELY VIGILANT BECAUSE WE HAVE A SPIRITUAL ADVERSARY THAT IS OUT TO GET US

THE REALITY: SPIRITUAL FORCES OF EVIL THAT ARE PERSONAL AND DANGEROUS

THE COMMAND: BE VIGILANT (8A)
“SOBER-MINDED”

“WATCHFUL”

THE ADVERSARY: LIKENED TO A FEROCIOUS LION (8B)
HIS NATURE

HIS METHODS

HIS GOAL

THE VICTORY: THE DEVIL IS NO MATCH FOR CHRIST IN US!
RESISTANCE

STANDING FIRM IN THE FAITH

THE APPLICATION
BE VIGILANT AND DON'T GIVE HIM OPPORTUNITY TO GET A FOOTHOLD

FEARLESSLY PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

BEWARE: DEVIL ON THE PROWL
1 PETER 5:8-9

1. WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR VULNERABILITIES THAT THE ENEMY TARGETS IN YOUR LIFE AND TRIES TO GAIN INFLUENCE?

2. WHAT CAN YOU DO, RIGHT NOW, ABOUT ENSURING THAT YOU ARE WALKING IN THE VICTORY OF CHRIST?

3. WHAT PRIORITY DOES SHARING THE GOSPEL HAVE IN YOUR LIFE?