

“Watch Out for the Lion” January 29, 2023

I don't know if you are a movie person, but there is a certain type of movie that I don't usually care for. I don't like scary movies in general. I just don't like that feeling. The last horror movie I watched was 15 years ago, and I couldn't sleep for 2 straight nights. I laid in bed the second night thinking, “This was so stupid. I didn't even like that movie. I will never watch another horror movie again.” And I haven't since. Inside the genre of horror or scary movies, there is a particular trope that is often depicted. I call it, “dumb people dying.” And it's easy to make fun of. Where there is this haunting bad guy chasing people down. And the group trying to get away looks over and says, “Should we get in that car and drive away?” and then someone else in the group says, “No, let's go hide in that dimly lit graveyard.” They run off into the graveyard and, next scene...dumb people dying.

One series of movies that I actually do like is the Jurassic Park movies. But honestly they follow the same sequence, especially after the first movie. Because at first I get it, you brought back dinosaurs and you want people to see them. Yeah. But, after it goes bad...next movie, “Wait you're going back to the island?!” Next movie, “Wait, you started the park again?!” Next movie, “You're bringing dinosaurs into your home?!”

And while it is an easily mockable movie cliché, our verse for today indicates that this pattern is actually a potential spiritual reality in our lives, that could lead to destruction and heartbreak and pain.

I am especially aware of God's providence this morning, that months and months ago the plan was for us to be studying this verse this morning, because I believe the thing this verse is warning against just played out in the life of one of my very best friends, who just had to step down from being one of our pastors. And I will tell you that I have never in my life taken what we are about to read more seriously than I do right now, and my hope for this morning is that the same will be true for you.

1 Peter 5:6-11.

The verse in our series passage we're highlighting today is verse 8, which says this:

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

It jumps out to me how extreme the language is. Be watchful, be on guard, you better be careful. Your adversary prowls around like a lion looking for someone to destroy. Like the new dinosaur in Jurassic Park who walks every inch of the fence to test it and see if there are any gaps or vulnerabilities it can exploit. There is a predator so fierce that it needs an impenetrable fence around it, otherwise it will maul you, and that fence better be without gap or weakness.

The other thing that comes to mind is, mostly because of our time and place, in our corner of the globe most folks don't think that there is a devil. So for a lot of people this verse reads like, “I want you to be super careful of this horrifyingly dangerous predator...that you probably don't think exists and almost never think about.” But in the story of the Bible, just as God is the personal supernatural presence of good, there exists supernatural personal evil.

CS Lewis famously said that people commit two equal and opposite errors when it comes to the devil and demons; they either see them around every corner and in every bush so to speak, or they never think about them at all. I don't know many people in our churches who think there's a demon in their toaster and that's why the bread burned. So, I would venture a guess that our biggest weakness would be thinking about him too little if at all.

And of course the problem with that is, if this verse is true, then you might not realize how much danger you are actually in. The dinosaur in Jurassic Park does not need for you to believe he exists in order to eat you.

So, we've got some work to do. Today I'd like us to briefly cover 2 things: **1) Who is the devil? 2) How might we be vulnerable to him?**

1) Who is the devil?

The Bible opens and inserts us into this spiritual world where heaven and Earth overlap called the Garden of Eden. Here, God's space and our space were united, with heavenly beings and earthly beings sharing the same space. And in this story, we find a snake in the garden. The story never actually names the snake as the devil, but later on Scripture does. We aren't given much detail about this character or his background, he is just there.

There is wide agreement that this being, represented as a snake in Genesis 3, is a spiritual being of some kind that has gone bad. Some scholars argue that Genesis 3 actually tells the story of his downfall as well because it starts by stating, "the serpent was more crafty than any other beast," and in the rest of the Old Testament the word for crafty actually has a positive connotation. It means shrewd or prudent, it is used a lot in Proverbs. And then after the snake tempts the humans, it is said he is, "more cursed than any other beast," hinting at the possibility that this may have been a twin spiritual and human rebellion.

Because of his actions, the snake is cursed, and the humans are driven out of this space. Heaven and earth no longer overlap, (spoiler alert) until the end of the story when the snake crusher comes back for good.

This might surprise you, but this creature, the devil, isn't actually given a name. The devil, in Greek, simply means the slanderer. The liar. The one who spreads false information about God and humans and reality.

If you're thinking, wait, isn't his name Satan? That's not a name either. It's a role or description that simply means, "the adversary, the opponent, the accuser," or as one scholar put it, "the hostile one." And in Hebrew, the language the Old Testament was written in, the word for "Satan" is always preceded by the word "the." Never "Satan," but "the Satan," or "ha Satan."

So, although we have essentially used the word "Satan" as a proper name for him over time, if we were to be most accurate in our speech we would actually say, "the Satan." And by that what we would mean is the enemy, the adversary, the opposer, the one who is hostile to God and hostile to people who are made in the image of God.

As well, when people refer to this being as Lucifer..." that is a translation of the Latin word for Day Star; another verse possibly referencing him, but not his name. Many think this is an act of refusing him dignity by not even giving him a name.

What we are given is simply a description of the role he fills: the enemy, the adversary. He is anti-everything good, anti-God, and anti-image bearers and anti-creation.

In addition to the role he plays, we are given a bunch of metaphors or images to describe him. Revelation 12:9 gives us a summary of several of these images used to describe him throughout Scripture. **9** And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

It's almost like the biblical authors, especially in an ancient context, are like, "What images can most appropriately render the ferocity and evil of this being?" The great dragon. The ancient serpent that we see represented in the garden of Eden. The deceiver of the whole world.

The devil is, essentially, hell in a being. He is a black hole of animosity, bitterness, and opposition to God that seeks to suck everything he can into himself. He is the enemy of all things good and whole and righteous. He wants to wreck your life and turn your heart away from God and wholeness and beauty in any way he can.

I know that depending on where you are coming from, this can feel a bit out there. I would just point out I think it's slightly ironic that sometimes in our context we think all we need is a pill and a science book and maybe a therapist, but we are drawn to stories like Harry Potter partly because of Voldemort. We are drawn to stories like Lord of the Rings partly because of Sauron. We are drawn to the Avengers because of Thanos. And maybe deep down all the best human stories have such profoundly evil antagonists because the universe itself has such an antagonist, and there is more than just unhealth or disorder in this world, there is real, live evil. All of that to say, the assertion of scripture is that this being exists, and that we should take his existence seriously.

And as much as the Bible states that we should be on guard against this being, it also states that just like the stories we love, there is a hero that defeats him. There is a dragon slayer; Jesus defeats the ancient serpent and brings us into victory over him. Jesus is in no way shape or form afraid of the devil, and in Revelation 19 we get a picture of his ultimate victory over evil:

Revelation 19:11-16

11 Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. **12** His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. **13** He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. **14** And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. **15** From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. **16** On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus came to Earth to destroy the works of the devil, as 1 John 3:8 says. He perfectly resisted every temptation the devil offered him, achieving a spotless righteousness that would be offered to cover our sin-stained souls. He died for our sins and rose victorious over death and the devil himself so that one day he will ride on a white horse and conquer every enemy of the good and holy world he set out to create, including the great dragon himself.

So, while the tone of our text today may be a little sobering, know that ultimately it's the future of Satan that is sobering. He is ultimately the one who should be worried, and he is. Another spot in Revelation says that Satan knows his days are numbered, so he tries to do as much damage as possible while he can.

The worldview Scripture thrusts upon us is that we live in a world in which the forces around us are not neutral. There really are spiritual things at play here that are set against you...set against your flourishing, set against your faith, set against your joy, peace, hope, contentment and life with God...a force that wants to destroy the work of God... most specifically, you.

And this instruction from Peter is to wisen up to that reality...and an invitation into the victory of Jesus. These words are telling us, "Hey, believer in Christ, you are with the rider on a white horse! You are attached by grace through faith to the victor. So, step into his victory by faith. By guarding yourself against the schemes of the evil one."

And in order to walk in the victory we've been given over him, we need to talk about how we may be vulnerable to his attack.

2) How might we be vulnerable?

This is where I tend to find that people get way out of line with what Scripture actually teaches, because the Bible gives some surprising answers to this question.

When the Bible was written, cities often had high walls all the way around them, as community-wide protection. The walls function like a fence around the whole city. It was a way to keep people out who wanted to do harm. If someone wanted to get in, they would have to find a way to climb over the wall.

So look at what Ephesians 4 says:
27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

So Paul uses this imagery of a wall and an enemy that wants to get inside and cause damage, but in order to get in there, in order to get over the wall and get inside he needs a place to put his foot and climb up on. The wall is too tall to run and jump. You have to be able to scale it. That's the concept of a foothold. It's a weakness in a fence or wall that would allow someone or something to come in. And there are certain things mentioned in Scripture specifically that might provide an opening for an enemy to cause destruction in your life. I'll give you some examples and see if any of these would have been on your list of possible ways you make yourself susceptible to attack that ultimately leads to breakdown, pain, destruction.

Look at **Ephesians 4:26-27**:

26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, **27** and do not give the devil a foothold. (NIV)

Was anger on your list of ways the devil climbs over the wall to get to you? Unrighteous anger, that you hold onto longer than you should, makes you vulnerable. He can get in there with your anger and press it all sorts of ways. Foster it, misdirect it, enliven it. You become embittered, mean spirited, grumpy, edgy, harsh, violent. Maybe you begin to seek out coping mechanisms to distract or numb. You become addicted or begin to act out in ways that a while ago you would've thought could never happen. So where God's intention is peace and beauty in your soul, now there's ugliness everywhere. And it didn't start with these big problems and outbursts and serious issues...it started with something that seemed small. Anger in your heart that you just...let stay there. But, it was a foothold. It was a point of vulnerability that you and I cannot afford to leave as is.

I'll give you another one. Paul talking to the church in Corinth...

2 Cor 2

10 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, **11** in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

So, Paul directly connects forgiveness to the work of our enemy and says that unforgiveness is in part, you and I being outwitted. Falling into a scheme. So, maybe someone wrongs you in some way and instead of bringing it to Jesus for the help you need to forgive in the same way that you have been forgiven, you hang onto it. You nurse a grudge and it grows. You begin to tell yourself a story that justifies your lack of forgiveness as bitterness sinks its roots deep. Grudges and bitterness are literally

toxic...they poison our relationships. Maybe from there a relationship is destroyed. I've seen marriages destroyed, family relationships severed, the closest of friendships shattered...all of which was unimaginable at a previous time. But unforgiveness was a foothold, it allowed attack, and a devastating enemy brought destruction.

Unresolved conflict and anger are a foothold. A gap in the fence. A liability.

Another one...

1 Cor 7

3 The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. **4** For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. **5** Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

God's intention is for married couples to have a mutually enjoyable, healthy sex life. With each of you interested in the enjoyment of the other, with good communication and all the fun that comes along with it. But, Scripture says that something as small and routine as frustration over a less than healthy sex life can make you susceptible. To harbor bitterness in your heart towards your spouse, distance in the relationship, to justify sinful sexual expression in whatever ways.

Check out **2 Timothy 2:**

23 Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. **24** And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **25** correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, **26** and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

There's something about foolish, ignorant controversies...(otherwise known as social media today) or constant fighting and bickering, in a non-gentle way, that leads people into a snare.

I was reading an article a while back called something like, "I lost my Mom to Facebook." It was a Christian guy talking about how his mom used to be so kind and gentle and godly, and over time her FB usage radicalized her politically and socially and made her hard-hearted and divisive and mean, and she actually became a person who brought destruction wherever she went. Or as this passage languages, she became ensnared and actually began to do the devil's work herself.

At no point does the Bible give an exhaustive list, but my hope at this point is that you are having some sort of realization that your proverbial city wall may not be as secure as you previously thought, or that your fence around that Jurassic Park dinosaur may need some beefing up.

I would like to point out that Scripture just mentioned a variety of things that make us susceptible and most of them that it mentions we might have otherwise been tempted to call, "Small." "Not big deals." Things that, dare I say, feel a little ordinary or commonplace, certainly not dangerous. Not things that you would probably feel a need to confess to LifeGroup and get help with. But, the truth is there is no such thing as a little sin because all sin when undealt with and when catalyzed by an enemy set out to destroy, carries with it the possibility of eventually destroying us. Of wrecking our lives. When you do not deal with the small things they have the potential to become big things. You leave yourself susceptible to them becoming big things. Very rarely does someone make 1 decision that ruins their life. Usually they make 1000 much smaller decisions that continue to build up the 1 decision that finally brings everything crashing down.

So, let me ask you something. Let's assume for a minute that the Bible is correct when it says that we have a real enemy looking to steal, kill and destroy, interested in devouring; and that he's looking for a point of entry, something he can use, a foothold, a gap in the fence, and crack in the armor. And that he has schemes, he has snares and traps, that he is cunning and smart. Let's take the Bible at its word. Here is my question for you. If the devil really is that evil and that smart, how would he come after you? If his intentions are to blow up your life as much as he possibly can, where are you vulnerable?

Imagine your life, 2 years, 5 years, 10 years from now. You are not doing well. You've grown spiritually cold. There is damage and sorrow and you are a far uglier person than you ever imagined you could become. If he were to accomplish his objective in you, how would he do it? Maybe it's through one of the ways above. Through unresolved anger or conflict, through frustration with your spouse, through false teaching or quarreling.

But, if the devil is as cunning as the Bible makes him out to be, chances are he might gain access to you in a way you don't necessarily suspect. A door that is unlocked and you didn't even realize it.

Maybe it's frustration with your stage of life. With not getting to the picture of your life you had in your mind that would be true at this age. And every day you find it just a little bit easier for your mind to drift towards rehearsing your frustration or disappointment or anger or jealousy. And it's a small thing that robs you of joy now, but even worse it's a point of entry that could lead towards much darker, dangerous things for your life and your soul.

Maybe it's that your marriage or family just isn't what you thought it would be. Day in and day out you struggle with the realities of the real life sinful people God has given you vs. the wish-dream you previously had in your mind. Maybe that disappointment is in the process of becoming bitterness, which will open you up to all sorts of paths towards breakdown.

Maybe for you, unresolved grief is being formed into a foothold that the Satan is going to eventually put his foot on and climb over. You think it's not a big deal and you keep dismissing it, but one day you may find yourself totally overrun like a city besieged, where you, right now, would not even recognize the future version of you that you've become.

Maybe it's through something as routine as disappointment with your job. Because it's just not at all what you hoped or thought you would be doing. It's unglamorous, unrewarding at times, underpaid, difficult, and there's little way out because of your age and work history.

Maybe it's bitterness in a relationship that he's going to start with. A particular, complicated relationship in your life with lots of deep feelings and sin. And he's going to break through the fence there.

Maybe it's through disagreement with a hot button cultural issue, where you don't realize it but you are captive to your time and place in history, and you let that become a seed of hostility that only grows and one day declares God the enemy.

We should not neglect any evidence of bitterness or hostility whatsoever. No matter how small. Because they very well might be the chinks in your fence, the footholds he uses to climb over.

The command is clear, and the stakes are incredibly high. Be watchful. Be sober-minded. Lock your doors against all of these things. Make sure there are no gaps in your fence, because that lion is prowling around, looking for any weak spots whatsoever. Make sure you have no openings in your life that make you susceptible and vulnerable.

The best news I have for you is that you and I are no longer captive to that great dragon, that ancient serpent. In Christ we have been given victory over him. By being sober-minded and watchful, we learn to walk in that victory achieved for us.

Last week I walked into my wife's office while she was working and I said, "I don't have any secrets and I'd like to keep it that way. There are a few things in our marriage that are frequently frustrating to me. And I think I would have otherwise never really said anything and just let them be there and from time to time be frustrated and that would be it, but this stuff with Allen has me spooked and I don't want to risk one day having secrets or worse." So, we're making a plan to work on them...I can't afford not to. Last Sunday I read a letter to you where Allen said that he could no longer be a pastor because of sin in his life. And his words were that he had some secret coping mechanisms that mostly seemed small and manageable, but that he never actually put to death. And the end result is a lot of pain in a lot of people's lives, especially in his and his family's.

And I do not believe the fact that we are studying this verse today to at all be coincidence. And I feel very strongly about what I am about to say to you. More strongly than I have ever felt. I am begging you, please do not have secrets in your life. Do not have sin that you just let linger. I don't care how small or insignificant they seem to you. They make you vulnerable in ways that you cannot afford to be. And you do not want to one day find out where they could potentially lead. None of us do.

Step into the victory that Jesus has already won for you. His victory over the devil, sin and death itself are yours. Don't leave a foothold. Don't open yourself up to danger and pain and sorrow.

8 Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

That's how I'd like to lead into our time of response today. I want to obey this command by asking the Spirit of God to help us see where we are susceptible. To help us see small things in our lives that carry with them the potential to become much larger things.

When you are ready, you can celebrate Jesus' victory by taking communion. But, before you do I want us to really examine our hearts. If there is anything you need to confess to Jesus and reveal to others in your community, don't wait. Get up and talk to them now, grab your spouse, or send a quick text and say, "Hey, I need to talk later...or you need to ask me about this later."

I don't care if you feel silly doing it. Do not wait, do not minimize, and do not allow any footholds to remain in your life. Please.

You and I are no longer captive to that great dragon, that ancient serpent. In Christ we have been given victory over him. So, step into that victory by taking whatever step you need to, right now.