

## Life is a Battle

Last week we explored the biblical concept of the spiritual world, and specifically the revelation that the natural world is not everything; it is only the dimension we can most readily observe and study. There is a dimension that is obvious and one that is not, but we all experience profound impacts from that “less obvious” realm - the realm of the spirit. Today we are going to look at some of the background to the fact that life often seems like a battle, one in which we find ourselves frustrated in our attempts to do even the things we want to do and to live the way we want to live.

Noel spoke back in March about the need to take this battle seriously and gave us some direction about doing just that, so I will try not to go over the same ground today. But let's go back and see how the battle began, how it is fought and, from there, how it can be won.

There was war in heaven. The unthinkable had happened. One of the leading angels, the worship leader, Lucifer, had rebelled against the authority and majesty of Creator God and had gathered to his side an incredible 1/3 of all the angels of heaven. But even with this rebel force, Lucifer was unable to gain the victory he sought and was forced out of heaven, thrown down to the earth in anger at his defeat, and from there he began to plot his revenge.

On this earth, God had planted a beautiful garden and within that garden he had placed the crown of His creation, man and woman, in His image, for His glory. And in that garden Lucifer, taking the form of a serpent, entered and began to work rebellion among this newest of God's created beings. Where do we find this in the Bible? There are pieces of it scattered throughout both Old and New Testaments and we have to put those pieces together in order to gain a picture of the spiritual battle that affects us all.

One place to start is in the last book of the Bible:

*Suddenly, I witnessed in heaven another significant event. I saw a large red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, with seven crowns on his heads. His tail dragged down one-third of the stars, which he threw to the earth. (Rev. 12:3)*

Then down to verse 7:

*Then there was war in heaven. Michael and the angels under his command fought the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle and was forced out of heaven. This great dragon -- the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world -- was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. (12:7-9)*

That all happened a very long time ago - the dragon, who is an ancient serpent (notice the reference to the serpent here) is called the Devil or Satan and is known as a deceiver = “the one deceiving the whole world”.

What about the name “Lucifer”? Let's begin with the fact that Lucifer means morning star and then we'll read this passage from Isaiah:

*How you have fallen from heaven*

*O morning star, son of the dawn!  
You have been cast down to the earth  
You who once laid low the nations!  
You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God;  
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,  
On the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.  
I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;  
I will make myself like the Most High."  
But you are brought down to the grave,  
To the depths of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12-15)*

The ultimate pride goes before the ultimate fall, and Lucifer fell from the height of ambition to deep despair. He wanted to raise his throne above the stars of God and sit enthroned on the mount of assembly ... to make himself like the Most High, but that would not have been right and God would not allow that to happen. And so Lucifer was, in the words of the prophet, cast down to the earth.

Let's go back to Revelation 12 and pick up the story from there:

*Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, "It has happened at last -- the salvation and power and kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the Accuser has been thrown down to earth -- the one who accused our brothers and sisters before our God day and night. And they have defeated him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of their testimony. And they were not afraid to die. Rejoice, O heavens! And you who live in the heavens, rejoice! But terror will come on the earth and the sea. For the devil has come down to you in great anger, and he knows that he has little time. (Rev. 12:10-12)*

This passage picks up right after where we left off when we started with Revelation 12 a few minutes ago. The devil had lost the war in heaven, had been thrown to earth, and now we read that a loud voice shouting across the heavens is celebrating this victory for God and His Anointed One. But at the end of this celebration of a vitally important victory, there is a warning. Terror will come on the earth and the sea for the devil has come down to you in great anger.

Here's what Christians believe: that there is a personal power that is good. He is called, in Scripture, Yahweh, God, Jesus, Holy Spirit and by the titles of God. We also believe that there is a personal force of evil in this world and that he goes by the name of Satan, or Lucifer, or by the title, 'the devil'.

There are very few people that doubt the existence of evil. But there are also very few that seem to understand where it comes from. Some people want to blame religion, because some of the radical religious groups cause a lot of trouble for others. Some people want to blame poverty or a lack of education for the existence of evil - as we saw in last week's study. And there are always a few that seem genuinely surprised when bad things happen, especially if those things are close at hand. But, outside of the

explanation that we see in Scripture, there has not been a clear and logical explanation for the existence of evil in this world, either in nature or in human relationships.

How does the Bible describe the way Satan goes about his work? There are a few very clear indicators as well as instructions about how we are to respond:

1. The first is that Satan, this personal source of evil in our world, is a liar. Jesus said this about him: "There is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44) At the beginning of this month, we saw how he deceived the woman in the garden by lying to her about what God had said and about the results of disobeying God's command.
2. The second obvious strategy is something called temptation. In Jesus' case, the devil tried to get Him to chase after things in a way that was inappropriate. He tempted Him to turn stones into bread, and we later saw that Jesus never did miracles for His own benefit, but to help others. He tempted Him with the authority over the kingdoms of this world, but only if Jesus would first worship him - not going to happen.
3. The third way in which Satan opposes believers is through accusation - one of his titles is "the accuser". Earlier we read Revelation 12:10 which describes Satan as the Accuser, "the one who accused our brothers and sisters before our God day and night."  
He also accuses us directly, reminding us that we are not worthy to receive grace and urging us to give up hope.
4. The fourth factor in his opposition to us comes with the knowledge that he rules the world - and, again, the "world" is the biblical term describing all those entities that exist for themselves, not submitted to God. The Bible describes Satan with these terms: "the god of this evil world" (2 Cor. 4:4), "the mighty prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), and "the one who rules the kingdom of darkness" (Col. 1:13). He and those beings who work with him are called "those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world." (Eph. 6:12)
5. One more indication of Satan's work is found in 1 Peter 5:8: "He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour." He is a predator and he is always looking for another victim from among those who are created by God for His glory and who are so loved by God that each loss is felt deeply in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It's a pretty depressing picture isn't it? The world is under the thumb of a malevolent personal force of evil who is bent on the destruction of all that God loves and who is powerful in deception, in temptation, as our accuser and devourer. Just hold that thought for a minute, before I get into the good news. The atheists club, who humbly call themselves the "brights", think that religion is the cause of evil and that the human race would be better off without what they would call the superstition of faith in Jesus.

Now, picture this: the end comes and all the goodness and grace that Jesus brought to this earth is removed. Every urge towards sacrificial love, towards forgiveness and reconciliation, towards peace and kindness is replaced by nothing more than an ethic of survival of the fittest, the absolute control over civilization by those who call themselves the brights and by the relentless pursuit of money, power and pleasure ... what would

you call that? I'd call it hell and I see Western culture moving towards that goal, willingly, excitedly, even, at a pace that is absolute madness.

But we're not there yet, and the Scriptures teach us to resist this onslaught as long as we have breath. So let's look at how we can continue to stand in the battle.

1. Number one: watch out! Be on the lookout for what the evil one is bringing against you. This comes from the first part of 1 Peter 5:8: "Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy." You know he will be attacking, so be alert, vigilant, aware. Don't be living with the values of the world, doing what everyone else is doing, participating fully in the things that the kingdom of darkness revels in. If you're doing that, you're not going to be aware of his plans against you and the strategies he has for your destruction. Peter had seen enough to know that this enemy is not to be taken lightly, so he writes to the believers in Asia Minor, "Be careful! Be alert and watchful!"
2. Second, and related to the central lesson of the message 3 weeks ago, don't become overconfident in your ability to know what's best. Be humble and dependent on God's Spirit and God's word as your guides as you resist the enemy in the struggle to live well and to be fruitful in God's Kingdom - that's the goal; let's not lose sight of it. Eve decided to make her own call on the relative wisdom of the serpent's advice - and the result has been a disaster for all the human race.
3. Be determined to do well. We understand that we fail often and are in need of God's grace, but that doesn't mean that we should stop making the effort to pursue righteousness. What do we read again and again in the letters of the New Testament? We read words that encourage us to love one another, to pursue peace with others, to forgive as God in Christ has forgiven us, to hold to high standards in sexual ethics and in business practices. Never do we read the words, "You're never going to be perfect, so just go on sinning your face off and rely on grace to pull you through." Never. You can read the whole Bible and you won't find that counsel. But, if you read slowly and carefully, you'll find a verse that says, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matt. 5:48) Jesus said that and He said it knowing that we won't be perfect - but we stretch out towards that goal, that prize, for His sake.
4. There was a man in the church in Corinth who was very immoral in his lifestyle ... and Paul wrote to them to tell them how to discipline this man. When he repented, sometime between First Corinthians and Second Corinthians, Paul urged the believers there to forgive him. "When I forgive him ... I do so with Christ's authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are very familiar with his evil schemes." (2 Cor. 2:10,11) Being aware that there are evil plots against us helps us endure things like family illness, relationship strife, disappointment in work or finances or friendship and other events in our lives that could be devastating if we had placed all our hopes and expectations in those things. Paul writes that they are very familiar with the evil schemes of the enemy - and we've seen them all as well. We know pretty much what he's up to.

Now the test is to stand firm, to respond in the best ways possible to the struggles we encounter in life. So let's spend a little bit of time today talking about how we will apply to our situations an understanding of the battleground that life is.

The presence of evil in the world that we live in has very little to do with survival - of the fittest or of anyone else. It does not come to us through something experienced through the process of human evolution - these kinds of fanciful explanations only come from people already fully committed to full-on Darwinism and wouldn't occur to people who are simply looking for the truth. Evil exists because of rebellion against God - both the initial rebellion led by Lucifer or Satan, and then all the human rebellion that has followed on from that.

When we look around us, when we look at what is being said - and not said - by our politicians, by media personalities, by academics, by actors and athletes and other high achievers, we hear the same refrain said over and over in different ways. What's important, what's valuable, is human rights and freedoms. These are the idols of our time, much more talked about and pursued than worship of God or obedience to His commands. How often do you hear someone outside of church talking about doing the right thing in reference to God instead of in reference to people? Doing the right thing is defined as being accepting of all and tolerant of any and every view. Doing the right thing is not usually talked about in reference to the ten commandments, the sermon on the mount or even the golden rule. A society that refuses to acknowledge God is spiritually adrift and we in the West have little idea of what we have drifted from or what we are drifting towards. This is the context for our struggle. Nice-sounding words, high-minded ideas, core values that acknowledge nothing higher than you, your feelings or your freedom to do whatever.

If it was more obvious, if most people saw through it and dismissed it, standing for Christian values wouldn't be a struggle - it would be 'going with the flow'. But it is a struggle ... real godliness, real goodness, is a real struggle. The call to sacrificial love is costly and the call to tell the truth is potentially very costly.

So, for us, for those who love and follow Jesus, the first and central call of Scripture is to stand. Don't go down. Don't give up, give in, give over to the enemy of your soul. "Stand firm", Paul tells the Ephesian Christians, after telling them to "be strong!" with the Lord's mighty power. And later he writes, "Stand your ground, putting on the sturdy belt of truth and the body armor of God's righteousness." (Eph. 6:10-14) Peter says the same thing in his first letter: "Take a firm stand against the Devil and be strong in your faith." These verses don't tell us anything that's complicated and difficult to understand; they tell us to remain unmoved, to stay on track, to be strong in our faith. When is that counsel most important to listen to and obey? When the enemy is coming at us with doubt and temptation and fear. At those times, we need to follow through on the determination of our hearts to honor Jesus with our lives and to simply make the choices that we know will please Him. Regardless of what the world is shouting at us or what confusion the forces of evil are bringing into our thoughts, stay the course, keep on

keeping on, and resist the Devil, as James tells us and then promises that the enemy will run away if we do (4:7).

The second major application for each of us in the battle is to stop shooting the people who are on the same side you are. This has been one of the chief sins of the church that I have experienced. Someone does something wrong and, instead of having people pray for that person, counsel and correct them, we shut them out. People who do wrong things need to be corrected, need to be prayed for, but they also need to be loved and they need to continue to be part of the family that brings the correction and the prayer and the counsel. Sometimes the person is not willing to receive that input from the body of Christ and they will leave the church, but I'm not talking about those situations. I'm talking about the people who do want to stay, who do need the input that the body of Christ has for them, and who also need to be loved and affirmed and included - a lot like you and I need to be loved, affirmed, included.

The third major application is closely related to the first two. The call is to stand, the call is to stand together, and you will not accomplish that goal if you don't stand in humility. If you're so proud of your judgments of others that you have to tell everyone what you think or if you're so shocked at someone else's failure that you run for the exits, you're opening the door wide for the enemy's attack on you. People I have known through the years have tended to make a stand for a doctrinal position or for someone else to do something about a difficult situation, but they tend to be slow to make the kind of stand these passages are talking about, the stand against Satan and his schemes. We're not quick to that because we're not humble enough to recognize that our faults and failures are the ones we need to address and that others' faults and failures should be the subject of our prayers and our longing for mercy that Micah teaches about (6:8). So, let's stand strong against the schemes of Satan, let's stand together against the schemes of Satan, and let's stand in humility together and defeat whatever the evil one brings against us.