

SATAN AND SUFFERING

by Doug Goins

We heard reports this morning from four brothers who have just returned from ministry trips to Russia and Germany. The sense of excitement they have about ministry and adventure is infectious. We can experience the same effectiveness in ministry whether we go half way around the world or just across the street in obedience to the Lord to pour your life out for others. A sense of exultation can be ours. We can know that we're in the right place, doing the right thing at exactly the right time.

But every time there is advance, conquest, a sense of victory in Jesus as he empowers us and directs us, there is always opposition. There will be distraction, disruption of the primary goal, and the purpose. I know whenever I get ready to minister internationally it seems like all hell breaks loose in my family, either illnesses with my children or my wife and I start quarreling. I get unreasonable with her because of my own rising anxiety levels as the trip approaches. Ron told us about the translator who was supposed to translate in their conference from English to Russian for the Ukrainians. This Christian young man was overwhelmed with anxiety and said he couldn't do it and he left. They were left for the entire conference translating from English to German and then from German to Russian because of fear that overwhelmed the young translator who just felt like he couldn't handle all the responsibility and pressure.

Behind the disruptions is an enemy. It's the enemy that was introduced to us in our reading from Revelation 12:1-17. The reality is that we will be involved in spiritual warfare if we try to make our lives count for Jesus. Now if we just sit in complacency and never leave the couch we don't have to worry a lot about spiritual warfare. But if we take Jesus seriously and his claim on our lives, Satan will oppose us.

"Then the dragon [that's Satan, this great satanic dragon] was angry with the woman [that's the nation Israel] and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring [we're spiritual children of Abraham through Jesus] on those who keep the commandments of God and their testimony to Jesus"
(Revelation 12:17).

The apostle Peter, in the fifth chapter of his first letter to his brothers and sisters in Turkey, deals with our great enemy, Satan (1 Peter 5:6-11). Peter talks about the reality of persecution for the name of Christ, of suffering because of Satan and his opposition. Satan is the spirit-being behind the fallen creation we live in. The "wicked one" is behind the rebellious world system. Satan is the one holding individuals in captivity. The men and women who oppose our faith, are not really acting as free persons. They're in bondage to the evil one, to Satan himself. Satan is our real enemy, not the people who make our life miserable.

These six verses fall into two sections, verses 6-9 focus on the activity of God as all powerful and mighty and tells us we are protected by the power of God. The second section is verses 10 and 11. It's built around the incredible resources God offers us as he is perfecting us. He is the God of all grace.

In the opening section, (verses 6 through 9), Peter says unequivocally that we are protected by the power of God, and are called to do battle against this satanic enemy. He lists four imperatives at the beginning of these four verses. The first two imperatives in verses 6 and 7 tell us to focus on the Lord, to obey him. The second two imperatives in verses 8 and 9 focus on Satan, on the opponent.

Verse 6 calls us back once again to submission.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that in due time he may exalt

you.

We've been called to submission over and over again throughout Peter's letter, to a position of humility, before the Lord. The "therefore" in verse 6 points back to verse 5. Peter says in the middle of verse 5,

"Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

That's a quote from Proverbs 3:34. The Bible consistently teaches that God is an active opponent of proud, arrogant people. Whatever form pride takes--self-confidence, self-sufficiency--God is opposed to pride. Look back at 1 Peter 3:12. Quoting the psalmist, Peter reminded us that

"the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers" [God is an ally, our resource in trouble; but, then in the second half of the verse] **"the face of the Lord is against those that do evil."**

When surrounded by trouble and difficulty and struggle, we don't want to be battling God at the same time because of disobedience in our lives. You see, God is either an adversary or he's an ally. He does give grace to us, he does give us his resources, but only to those who are submissive, humble people. There is grace available to enable us to withstand suffering and struggle. All we have to do is relax and ask him for help.

Verse 6 says that it is God who has *"the mighty hand."* That is a wonderful Old Testament allusion first appearing in connection with the Exodus. The nation Israel is in bondage and slavery. They're oppressed by satanic evil through the worship of the Pharaohs. They can't save themselves, so they call out to God. The Old Testament writer says "his mighty hand of salvation delivered them." Throughout the rest of Old Testament history that imagery became a consistent symbol of God's deliverance, his provision, his care, his active intervention. He showed up over and over again to protect them, to defend them, to save them. There is also a promise in verse 6 that *"God will exalt us."* But, it will happen in his timing, not our timing. We never think God's deliverance is quick enough. We wish he would raise us up out of the circumstances we're in sooner or later, the suffering, difficulty, struggle, and sorrow. The promise that's coming (verse 10) is that he really will restore us, establish us, strengthen us, and settle us, but it will be in his timing, when he knows it is best for us.

If we can accept a position of humility before him, submit to him, the result, he says in verse 7, is that we can rest secure in his safety, in his commitment to us. *"Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares about you."* The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippians calls us to make the same choice. *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say rejoice."* That's in the Lord, not in the circumstances, but rejoice in the Lord.

"Let all men know your forbearance. The Lord is at hand. Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (4:4).

This theme of being joyful, even in the midst of difficulty, has been central to every passage we've examined this month. Not that we take great delight in the circumstances, but we look beyond them to who God is, what God is doing, and what he is ultimately going to accomplish in our lives.

Verse 7 literally says "place, or drape over" Jesus, all of your anxieties. The Greek word was used for clothing. Take the apprehensions, the fears, the nervousness, the uncertainty off your own back, and let Jesus carry them. He's got the broad shoulders, we don't. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount that we don't have to worry about bodily necessities. Think how much of our energy is taken up worrying about money, clothing, and food. We can give those concerns to him. Over and over again in the gospels, Jesus says "quit worrying and start trusting me. You can have rest and peace if you'll trust me."

One of the reasons that we can do that, (the second phrase in verse 7), is because we really know that God cares

about each one of us personally. We are known intimately. Jesus said that the hairs on our head are numbered. He knows every little detail of our pain and struggle. We don't suffer in anonymity. He knows us inside out.

There are two more important imperatives in this section, one in verse 8 and one in verse 9. They both call us to battle. Peter calls us to objectivity about Satan and to resist Satan. Look at verse 8:

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

We were called to sobriety in the first week back in 1:13 when he said

"Gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

There he said to be objective about who Jesus is, what he's accomplished in your life, what you can trust him for in the future. Now we are to be objective about Satan. Take him very seriously. We are to be watchful, vigilant. We must not be lulled into complacency about satanic opposition. All through the scriptures, Satan is described as our adversary. He's an enemy, who despises humanity in general, and all of us as followers of Jesus Christ in particular. In Calvin Miller's wonderful trilogy about the life of Christ, *The Singer, The Song* and *The Finale*, Miller's name for Satan is *World Hater*. That's a powerful description of Satan's attitude towards humanity. Why is he angry? Why is he so hateful?

We saw in our reading, in Revelation 12, he is an angry, defeated foe.

The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who is called the devil and Satan. He's the deceiver of the whole world [he's a liar, that's the core of his being; he's deceptive, seductive]...Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come [present tense] and the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down..."
(Revelation 12:9-10).

One of Satan's tactics in battle is accusation, to convince us of not being justified in Jesus, to try to make us insecure about our relationship with Christ, to convince us we are not worthy or no longer deserving of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Verse 12 says,

"the devil has come down to you in great wrath..."

In John's view, Satan is like a frightening sea monster, a dragon, a horrible dragon--the kind mythical dragons we were afraid of as little children. In Peter's imagination, he's likened to a roaring lion. He's really a wounded, dying lion and therefore vicious. I remember as a kid seeing *Wild Kingdom*, a television program, and learning that wounded animals in the jungle are much more ferocious and aggressive, out of their pain. They're to be feared. So you have in Satan this viciousness that's frightening. He's looking for someone to swallow whole, to destroy. He wants to attack any individual who represents the kingdom of God. He wants to get at the conquering general, the Lord of the Universe, through us, the people who belong to him.

I was amazed in our prayer sheet this morning, half of the requests for prayer have to do with direct Satanic attack in different areas of life. The very first one was prayer for a family whose 34 year old daughter had committed suicide. Satan was victor in that one. He convinced someone that her life wasn't worth living. A young man is in jail for attempted murder. That's one of the ways that Satan is defined in the Bible. He is a murderer, he hates life, physical and spiritual. There are two requests for marriages in trouble, marriages under great stress and a woman whose husband has asked her for a divorce. One of the places that Satan is attacking viciously in our culture today is the home and the family. If he can destroy mothers and father, husbands and wives and the children that come out of that, he is delighted. Finally, there is a request from a man who is dying from cancer who doesn't know Jesus personally. We're all going to die of one thing or another, but what Satan desires is that we die in the kingdom of darkness, we die without a relationship to Jesus Christ. Those are some of the ways that Satan attacks

flat out, trying to destroy and devour out of his fanatical hatred.

Satan is a seducer, he's a tempter, he's bent on destruction. Remember when he asked God permission to assail Job in the Old Testament. His avowed goal was to get Job to curse God and then die, die apart from God, out of relationship with his heavenly Father. Jesus in the wilderness was tempted by Satan. Satan was trying to undermine Jesus' commitment to the plan of his heavenly Father. Satan said, "There's another way you can do this. You can help people, you can do a lot of good, change a lot of people's lives, but don't do it your heavenly Father's way." That is Satanic influence. The apostle Peter at one point was accused of being an agent of Satan in the life of Jesus. As Peter unfolds this passage I'm sure this is very clear in his memory. There was a time when Peter said to Jesus, "You don't really have to go to the cross, Lord. You don't have to die." He said it out of misplaced sentimentality. And Jesus whirled around and said, "Get behind me, Satan." It's satanic influence trying to undermine what God wants to do in and through me."

The good news is that Satan is already defeated! The decisive battle which brought his doom was won at the cross. In reality, we are in the waning days of this cosmic war. We saw that clearly in the passage read to us from Revelation 12. In verse 12, John says Satan knows that his time is short. One of the reasons he's so ferocious, is that he is running out of time and he knows it. Not only is he short on time but his influence is strictly limited. He can never ultimately hurt or destroy those who belong to the Lord Jesus.

When I was in the fifth grade I had to walk ten blocks to school. On my first day of school I was walking by a big old house which was all overgrown with hedges and trees. Out of nowhere came this huge German shepherd charging ferociously across the yard at me. Somehow I escaped and making a big wide berth, gingerly and quietly, finally got to school. For the next month I made a three-block detour around that house, scared to death of that giant German shepherd. Then one morning my mom drove me to school. As we drove by the house, I sat way down in my seat peeking out the window, waiting for this dog to leap out and rip our car to shreds. Sure enough, out he came charging across the yard! But just as he reached the edge of the yard, I saw that he was tied to a clothesline. His collar jerked him up short. Then I realized he could never have gotten me. He was very limited in what he could do. Yes, he could scare the dickens out of people, but as long as I didn't get close to him he couldn't hurt me at all. The same is true of Satan. We can stand and resist him, as verse 9 tells us:

Resist him firm, in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.

There are several ways that we can resist Satan. We stand firm in faith. We can claim the fact that we are beloved of Jesus Christ. Jesus cares about us. He knows us intimately. We're protected by the Good Shepherd. Remember chapter 2, verse 25,

"You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls."

Jesus is the good Shepherd who protects sheep from angry, hungry lions. Christ also guards us. That's a military word, in Greek. He protects us from any kind of Satanic destruction we might be frightened of. According to verse 6 we have the mighty hand of God protecting us. In Paul's great teaching on spiritual warfare, (Ephesians 6) he begins by telling us,

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of his might."

God is our powerful protector. By myself I am not that tough as an opponent of Satan, but Jesus is in me and we can trust him. Verse 9 further tells us to resist Satan confident in the certainty that suffering at the hands of Satan is required of all believers, everywhere at all times. Suffering really is normative for the Christian. Jesus warned Peter before his own arrest and trial that he was going to be sifted by Satan. "Sifted" means tempted by Satan. It happened, too, and Peter gave into the temptation. He denied the Lord Jesus three times--failing miserably. Peter understands from experience the seriousness of this type of temptation and he realizes that all of us go through it.

Temptation to deny our Lord is not foreign to any of us.

Satan always means for suffering to be destructive--he wants to devour us, to destroy us completely. But God has his own purposes in difficulty, in suffering. He wants it to be instructive, to grow us up, to toughen us. Look at the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. He suffered terribly at the hands of his brothers. They sold him to Moabite slave traders because of their jealousy of Joseph. Joseph was taken down to Egypt where he went from the frying pan into the fire. Ending up in prison for a number of years, an innocent man, God exalted Joseph out of that struggle and difficulty. He placed him in a position of leadership in the house of the Pharaoh. Years later his brothers came to Egypt because of famine in Judah where they threw themselves on the mercy of the Pharaoh's court. Finally, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers--"I'm the guy you sold into slavery thirty, forty years ago?" Then he added, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." Satan wants to destroy us through suffering. God wants to toughen us, mature us, grow us up. Ray Stedman said some years ago, "We come out of suffering either bitter or better." It depends on what you're going to look at, whether you see God at work in it, or you're resistant and angry about the process itself.

This passage ends with a great doxology of praise. Praise is expressed because God is graciously at work in our lives in spite of satanic attack. God is working in these things perfecting us, changing us. Verse 10:

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, establish, strengthen and settle you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

There is light at the end of the tunnel in the process of suffering. These are great words of encouragement, of promise and of assurance. Peter says that our suffering is *only for a little while*, no matter how long it *seems* to us. It does often seem long from our perspective--but compared to the joy and the glory that will follow when Jesus takes us home, our suffering really doesn't amount to much. The apostle Paul talks about the suffering in his own life, the difficulty and pain--he describes it *as slight momentary afflictions*. Slight and minimal, and only momentary compared to the glory that will be revealed. Do you know what those slight momentary afflictions were? Here's what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:

Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches."

That's "slight, momentary affliction"! That's "the little while" that Peter talks about!

Peter says, in verse 10, that we are dealing with *the God of all grace*--the God of **all** resource, **all** adequacy, **all** provision. This is like a doxology, building in intensity, in volume, in enthusiasm. If it were set to music there would need to be a great crescendo. Tympany rolling, it would be getting louder and fuller and stronger. It's hope that we hang on to! The promises, in verse 10, tell us that God will do four things for us as we go through times of suffering. The first thing Peter says is that *he will restore us*. Literally the Greek word means "to repair or mend a net," or "to set a broken bone." Peter was a fisherman so he'd think of sewing or repairing the holes in his fishermen's net. Suffering will *add* to our character, it will *repair* flaws in our character, making us more like Jesus. Suffering will add a needed dimension to our life. I found in one of the commentaries a beautiful example from the life of Sir Edward Elgar, the British composer who wrote oratorios, symphonies and operas at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of this century. He was listening to a young woman, a soprano with a beautiful voice singing his music. She was singing exquisitely. She had a beautiful voice technically, there was clarity, range and purity. Someone overheard Elgar say, "She will be truly great when something happens to break her heart." Though she had a beautiful voice to start with, there was a missing dimension of authenticity. You

could say that suffering is meant by God to add *grace notes* to our lives.

The second thing Peter says is that God will *establish us*. Literally, the word means "to be as firm as granite or steel." We're being hardened and solidified and toughened through suffering, like fired and tempered steel. The third phrase Peter uses is that God will *strengthen us*. Literally, we will be "filled with bodily strength." It's like bodily discipline through exercise which toughens up a flabby body, replacing fat with muscle. That's what God's doing to us through suffering. In our suffering we have the perspective of the Olympic athlete who is in training because he is shooting for the gold medal. He knows that's where he's headed, he knows that's the purpose in all of his pain and difficulty. Finally, Peter says God will *settle us*. He uses an architectural term in Greek. It means "to lay a foundation for a building." Suffering will drive us to the bedrock of our faith, to our foundation which is Jesus himself. In suffering we figure out what's superficial in life, what's unnecessary, we're stripped of all the excess baggage and driven to the one thing that we can really build our lives on, Jesus Christ himself. In that sense, suffering does us all a great service. It evaluates for us what's superfluous and what is essential.

God's has promised to do every one of these four things for us through suffering. But it's only going to happen to those whom God has *called to share his eternal glory in Christ*. The only people who will have these things built into them are those who have surrendered themselves to Jesus; knelt at the foot of his cross; accepted his sacrificial death on their behalf; accepted his forgiveness for sin; said "yes, Jesus be the Lord of my life, I'll follow you and serve you." That's the kind of people that God will build these things into.

Our confidence is in Jesus Christ. He defeated Satan on the cross and he also defeated all the powers of sin and death and hell, everything we're afraid of has been conquered at the cross. At the heart of our study we've looked at the apostle's concern for us to understand and to resist Satan who is prowling around like a lion, roaring out his anger, his hatred. This Satanic lion has already been defeated by the Lion of Judah, the resurrected Jesus Christ, from the tribe of Judah in the Old Testament. The lion was a symbol of that tribe. In the *Chronicles of Narnia*, C.S. Lewis named that conquering, risen lion Aslan. We strengthen ourselves in him, in that risen Aslan. He removes our fear of Satan, that roaring lion. That's why we can all join in on that final climactic triumphant refrain in verse 11,

"To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen."

In the verse we closed with last week, verse 19 of chapter 4, God is identified as a faithful Creator, the one who begins life, sets everything in motion, the one who sustains us daily through the here and now. He's the beginning, the middle and now in 5:11 he's the eternal sovereign, looking beyond time and space into the realm of eternity. That's the God that we trust with our future, as uncertain as it may be, as difficult as it may be, we are protected by the power of God, we're learning, by his mighty hand. We're being protected from the worst that Satan can do to us and we are being perfected by the grace, by the resources of God, the God of all grace, even in the midst of suffering and struggle. And we praise him for his dominion and authority and power over everything.

Probably no one in the history of the church has written more pointedly and preached more powerfully about this reality, of victory out of spiritual warfare than Martin Luther, the Augustinian monk who God called uniquely to be the father of the Reformation in Germany. Luther saw the work of Satan very clearly in opposition to what he was doing. Martin Luther was very candid about his own personal struggles with depression, melancholy, and anxiety. He saw Satan trying to attack him in those areas. Yet he came to believe so strongly that Jesus was victor that we can benefit from his conviction. Listen to an exhortation from a sermon that he preached out of 1 Peter 5, summing up our passage this morning:

Peter would, with his admonition, make Christians bold and confident to resisting the temptations of the devil and defending themselves. He would not have us feel terrified or despair before Satan, even though that wicked one press us hard through the instrumentality of the world and of our flesh, as well as by his direct onslaughts. We are not to fear though he seems too strong for us and though surrender to his prowess seems inevitable. We are to have a manly heart and fight valiantly through faith. We must be assured that if we remain firm in the faith we shall have strength and

final victory. The devil shall not defeat us. We shall prove superior to him. We have been called of God and made Christians to the end that we renounce the devil and contend against him and thus maintain God's name, God's word and God's kingdom against him. Christ our head has already in himself smitten and destroyed for us the devil and his power. In addition, he gives us faith and the Holy Spirit whereby we can wholly defeat Satan's further wickedness and his attempts to overthrow us. A Christian should bear all this in mind, I say, and learn to experience the strength and power of faith, so will he not yield to temptation and enticement from the evil one.

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