

God Calls us to Fight

- 1 Peter 5:8-9
- As we look at verses 8-9 today, I remind you that we talked about humility last week as the operating system for the Christian. We humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, casting our anxieties onto him, rejoicing in the truth that we are the object of his care and love. Under his care and in his arms is where we are and is the only place to be! Especially knowing that we have a very real enemy who is seeking to devour us. There's a good series on Netflix called "Predators," and it takes a look at some of God's creations, cheetahs, lions, pumas, polar bears and wild dogs, all of which are skilled predators. Especially the big cats. They have the advantage of being smarter, stronger, and faster than the animals they seek and devour. The only advantage an antelope has, if there is any at all, is that the antelope believes in the big cats. He has been taught from birth that his enemies are real. On the other hand, more than 40% of Americans, in a Gallup poll done this year, do not believe the devil or hell is real. Let's look at today's text under three main points: Our adversary, Our resistance, and Our brotherhood.
- **Our adversary (verse 8)**
- John Piper said, "If we know the Lord cares for us, should that make us careful? Or careless?" Peter clearly believes it should make us careful because he follows that promise, "because he cares for you," with two imperatives. Be soberminded. Be watchful. Why do we need that, Peter? *God cares for us!* Yes, he does. But, he says, "Your adversary the devil" is seeking you. We have an adversary and we need to know who he is. It's the devil. Peter doesn't say "Your adversary the pastor." Or "your adversary your wife." Or "your boss," Or, your adversary, "a certain political party." No, we have a real and powerful adversary that hates us and wants to destroy us. He is seeking us like a lion seeks his prey. That imagery doesn't mean as much to us as it would have to first century Christians. Unless you have been on an African safari, the only lions you have seen are on TV or in the zoo. But the Christians in Rome knew the terrors of a roaring lion. They had seen the horrors of the Roman Colosseum. Ignatius, the Bishop of the Church in Antioch would know it well many years after Peter wrote this letter. Ignatius said before they led him to his death in the Colosseum, "Let me be given to the wild beasts, for through them I can attain to God. I am God's wheat, and I am ground by the teeth of the (lions) that I may be found pure bread...Come fire and cross and grapplings with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, hacking of limbs, crushing of my whole body, come cruel tortures of the devil to assail me. Only be it mine to attain unto Jesus Christ."
- We have an adversary, the devil. The word for adversary is a legal term, and that is the strategy of the devil. He knows he cannot make an unbeliever out of a believer. He was defeated at the cross and because of that, Jesus said, nothing can snatch us from the Father's hand. But the devil is prowling around collecting evidence. He is a legal expert who cares nothing about justice. He hates God and will do anything he can to accuse the brethren and discourage them and make them unfruitful in their lives. Jesus said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy." (John 10:10) He cannot destroy believers but he is looking for any opportunity to attack. That's why Paul wrote, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." (Eph. 4:26-27)
- The enemy is real and the fight is real. We are not called to be passive, but to be soberminded. Clear in our thinking. And to be watchful. Awake and alert to the schemes of the devil. And we need to see ourselves as soldiers who go into battle every day. When our children were little, we had them memorize Ephesians 6:10-17 because we knew the battle was not really with their brothers and sisters but with rulers, principalities, spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. The kids would stand up after family devotions in the morning, and they would recite that passage while acting out putting on the armor of God. They put on, symbolically, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the gospel of peace. They took up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. They didn't understand that then like I

believe they do now, but we wanted them to see that God's Spirit within us produces fighters, warriors for the Kingdom. Not pacifists. So, how are we to fight? That leads us to...

- **Our resistance (verse 9)**

- "Resist him, firm in the faith." Resist comes from two Greek words, stand and against. We don't run from the adversary. We stand against him, just as Jesus did in the wilderness. And we don't resist him in our name, but we resist him in Jesus' name, firm in our faith. Otherwise, we will end up like the seven sons of Sceva in the book of Acts who tried to cast out demons by saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." The demons in the man said, "Jesus we know and Paul we've heard of, but who are you?" And they beat the clothing right off those seven men who ended up naked and wounded and running for their lives. *They didn't stand against the devil in Jesus' name because they didn't know Jesus.* Peter said our only hope against the devil is our faith in Jesus, and we are to stand firm in that faith. It is exactly what James said: "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) Only settled faith can withstand the devil. Submit to God. Stand in his authority. Face the devil and resist him. And he will flee.
- What if our faith fails? It will sometimes, but that is not the end for those who belong to Jesus. Peter knew this as well as anyone ever has. Look at what Jesus said to him on that Thursday night in the upper room. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." Do you see that? Jesus knew that the devil was going to attack Peter and that he wanted to *have* Peter. Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail. But Jesus knew that Peter would not be able to stand firm in the faith; his faith would fail. The good news is that Jesus knew Peter's faith would only fail temporarily. "And when you have turned again," Jesus said to Peter, "strengthen your brothers." Peter is an example to all of us that when we fail to resist the devil and he gets the better of us, that's not the end of the story. We don't throw off the belt of truth and lay down the shield of faith at that point and give up and cross over to the enemy's camp. No! We receive the grace of the Lord to stand up, tighten that belt of truth, hold that shield of faith a little tighter by his grace, and get back in the fight. We don't become careless or begin to "care less" about walking out our faith. We get more careful, more sober-minded, more watchful. And we are reminded of Paul's words, "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me." (1 Cor. 15:10) That leads us to...

- **Our brotherhood (verse 9)**

- Peter closes the verse with, "knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." *Your brotherhood.* One of the most common strategies of the devil is to convince a believer that no one knows what he is going through, no one has ever suffered like she has, and you are all alone. That strategy worked with Elijah, arguably the greatest prophet of the Old Testament. He faced off with 450 prophets of Baal and made them look like the Little Sisters of the Poor taking on the Georgia Bulldogs. It was a slaughter in the truest sense of that word. But then Elijah heard that Jezebel was out to get him and "he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life." And he went and hid from *Jezebel* in a cave! God asked him the same thing you are thinking right now. "What are you doing here, Elijah?" And do you remember what Elijah said? Basically it went like this. "I am the only one in the world who has been faithful to you, God. I, even I only, only me, nobody else, is left, and now they are trying to kill me." Elijah had suddenly lost hope because of wrong thinking.
- What is the saying? We can live 40 days without food, 3 days without water, 3 minutes without air, but not even 3 seconds without hope. I remember the experiment that was done in the 1950's with lab rats put into buckets of water. They would not last more than about two minutes before they gave up and drowned. Then the experimenter would watch them until it was clear they had given up, and he would lift the rat out of the water, hold him for a few minutes, and put him back in the water. The same

result for each rat that was rescued was that it swam much longer than it had the first time. The only thing that had changed was that it had been saved, so it had hope. In their tiny little rat brain they believed there was something else, someone else out there who would rescue them. They believed they were not alone in the struggle. Listen, beloved. If the enemy of our souls can convince us that we are all alone in the struggle, all alone in our suffering, we will quickly lose hope. But what Peter reminds his readers is that we are not alone. We are part of a brotherhood of believers, brothers and sisters together in the fight, battling side by side, and *each of us in Christ*, but going through suffering. Part of our ministry to one another is the ministry that Paul and Barnabas had with the first churches they planted after they had been sent off from Antioch. They came back through those cities and they stopped in each church, “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:22)

- We have an enemy. But he is already defeated and we are already victorious because of Christ, our champion. We stand against the enemy because of Christ, and we stand in the armor of faith and truth and righteousness, wielding the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And the “weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds.” **Submit to God, beloved. Stand against the enemy. And he will flee.**
- Prayer
- Greet One Another