

The story is told of a certain African tribe that learned an easy way to capture ducks that gathered in a river, and here's what they did.

The tribesmen learned to go upstream, place a pumpkin in the river, and let it slowly float down into the flock of ducks. At first, the wary ducks would freak out and fly away. After all, it wasn't ordinary for pumpkins to float down the river. But again, the persistent tribesmen would float another pumpkin into the re-gathered ducks. And sure enough, the ducks would quack and scatter, only to return after the pumpkin had floated downstream. Once again, the tribesmen would float another pumpkin. This time the ducks would remain, but with a cautious eye on the pumpkin, and with each successive passing, the ducks would become more comfortable with this strange object, until they finally accepted the pumpkins as a normal part of life in the river.

When the tribesmen saw that the pumpkins no longer bothered the ducks, they hollowed out pumpkins, put them over their heads, and walked into the river. Then slowly meandering into the midst of the comfortable and unsuspecting ducks, they pulled them down under the water one at a time. Roast duck was on the menu for evening supper.

Just like these tribesmen, we have a very crafty enemy who is very subtle and cunning in his ways, and if we are not careful, he can pull us down like an unsuspecting duck, creating havoc and chaos in our lives.

This morning we are going to spend a little time looking at our common enemy and the tactics he uses against believers, especially believers who may find themselves somewhat vulnerable in the midst of suffering. So, let's pick up where we left off last week, and turn in your Bible to **1 Peter 5:8**. Peter says,

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Last week, we ended with **verse 7**, where Peter tells us to **“cast our worries upon God, because He cares for us”** and without a doubt – believers should place their trust and their hope in God because we are His concern, but with that said, believers should not become overconfident to the point of becoming careless.

Peter tells us that we can't let our guard down. We are to be watchful. We need to be under control because we have an enemy who is like a **roaring lion** with his sights set on you and me. We have an enemy who hates our guts, and he is

stalking and hunting us – not so he can lick us, or nibble on us, or say “*tag your it*” – he wants to destroy and devour us. That’s his wicked intent.

So, who is this enemy? Peter says it is the **devil** (*diabolos*), who is also described as the serpent, the Great Dragon, the ruler of this fallen world. He’s called the prince of the power of the air, the evil one, and the adversary – actually, the Greek word *Satanas*, “Satan,” comes from a Hebrew word for “*adversary*.”

The Bible teaches that Satan was an angel, a very powerful cherub, the highest of angels, who in his pride, revolted against God after the creation of the world. Satan was an angel, so he is not equal to God, but he is opposed to God, and with the assistance of fallen angels, who we refer to as “demons”, he wants to frustrate God’s plan by seeking to overwhelm us, to separate us, and to destroy us. Satan is our adversary – our enemy and he’s prowls like a lion, so we can’t let our guard down. Now with that, I have some good news and I have some bad news.

First, here’s the good news. As a believer, Satan cannot do anything to you apart from God’s control or permission. We saw this with **Job** where Satan had to seek permission from God to test him. Satan wanted to attack Job, but he could not touch a hair on Job’s head because of God’s protection. Now, if you recall the story, Satan did get permission from God to cause calamity in the life of Job – but with limits. God set boundaries that Satan could not cross, and when the testing was over, when the calamity ceased, when the dust finally settled – Job became much better, more knowledgeable, richly blessed, and stronger in the end.

Then there is the Apostle Paul. If you recall in **2 Corinthians 12:7**, Paul tells us of his own affliction by Satan. He said,

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself!

What happened? Well, Paul got a small taste of heaven – he got a vision of it, and because of the potential for conceit and pride, God allowed a messenger of Satan to put a thorn in Paul’s flesh – whatever it was, to keep him humble. It was difficult for Paul, in fact, he pleaded with God three times to take it away, but God would not. Instead, for Paul’s own good and for a greater purpose, God wanted Paul to find comfort and peace in the grace that he had received, and in Paul’s weakness, God’s strength would become more evident. So, Satan, only with God’s permission, was allowed to afflict Paul.

And then we come to the disciples, and Satan surely wanted to chew them all up. In **Luke 22:31-32**, Jesus was talking to His disciples, and then He singled out Peter and said,

³¹ “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; ³² but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

What happened with Peter? Well, if you remember, Peter said he wouldn't deny Jesus. All the other disciples would probably fall away according to Peter, but not him. Peter boasted that he was ready go to prison and even die with Jesus. Peter was prideful, and as we know *“pride comes before a fall.”* Peter denied Jesus three times – his courage had failed him, but just as Jesus had prayed – his faith did not fail, and Peter was restored to fellowship with Jesus and was greatly used to strengthen God's people from his personal experience. That was God's purpose.

So, Satan can't huff and puff and blow your house down like the big bad wolf whenever he wants to. He can't kick in your front door. As a believer, he can't do anything to you without God's permission, and if God's permission is given to him, it is for a purpose.

Now, for the bad news, and it should come as no surprise that we are our own worst enemies. We are more dangerous to ourselves. Think about this for a moment. Satan has to ask for God's permission to cause trouble for us – but we on the other hand, can give Satan an occasion to gain a foothold in our lives. In other words, the front door is locked, so we crack open the back door and give him an opportunity – an opportunity not to possess us for he can't do that, but to mess with us. **And how do we do that?** By walking in continued disobedience. We do that with unresolved anger. We do that with unforgiveness, and just like Peter, we can do that with pride.

For example, when speaking about unresolved anger, the Apostle Paul said this in **Ephesians 4:25-27**,

²⁵ Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. ²⁶ Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity.

If we are not careful, we can allow Satan to get his foot in the door, so to speak – to mess with us – to exploit us – to create havoc and chaos in our lives. Now, if you noticed in that passage from **Ephesians**, Paul spoke about *falsehood* and *truth*, and it reminds me of the tactic used by Satan’s against us. In the same way the tribesmen caught those ducks in the river with those pumpkins through deception, so it is with our enemy. Deception is his “go to” tactic because that’s what he does best.

One day, Jesus was speaking with the self-righteous religious leaders who wrongly thought they knew God and were following Him, and He said to them in **John 8:44-45**,

⁴⁴ You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

We are told that Satan is a liar. Deception is his trademark. He is the master of deception because he’s been doing it from the very beginning – starting all the way back to the Garden of Eden. Satan is the father of lies, and so he’s really good at it, even tossing in a little bit of truth just to make his lies sound right.

So, what are some of the lies Satan tells us, especially in times of suffering when we might be vulnerable?

Well, immediately, I think of his lies which are related to **verse 7**, where Peter said “*cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares about you.*”

We talked about that verse last week. Peter says, just throw your worry on God – all the discouragement, the questioning, the doubt – just cast your cares, your anxiety, and your worries on Him because you and I are His concern – God cares for us. He’s our heavenly Father, He cares, and He simply asks that we trust Him, especially in hard and difficult times. This is what the Bible teaches, it’s the truth, but Satan wants us to doubt God and tells us something different. He says,

There really is no God, but if there is one, it will do you no good to cast your cares and concerns on Him, because He really can’t help you. You are just wasting your time. God is powerless to help you with your problems so there is no need to pray, but if you worry about your problems more, surely that help your situation.

It's a complete lie, and it completely contrary to the truth found in God's Word. For example, we are told in **Isaiah 41:10**,

“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.”

That's the truth. We can believe the truth or we can believe a lie.

Now, Peter also said in **verse 7** that God cares about you. We are God's concern – He cares for us because He loves us, but that's not what Satan whispers in our ear, especially after we mess up or when God does not answer our prayers in the way we had hoped. Satan tells us,

*God does not care about you. Sure, He loves the world, but that doesn't mean you. He does not love you. **If He did, would this be happening to you? Would you be suffering like this if He really loved you and cared about you? If God really loved you, He would answer your prayers just like you want Him to.***

Satan will work overtime to make us question and doubt God's love for us because God's love is foundational to the gospel. The truth is, God loved us so much that He sent His Son to the cross on our behalf. Out of His love, Jesus paid our sin debt in full and we are declared righteous in the eyes of God. Our salvation is the ultimate expression of God's love for us – **what more could He do to prove it?** The Apostle Paul expounds on God's love and tells us in **Romans 8**, beginning with **verse 38**,

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Out of God's abundant love, reflected in the person of Jesus Christ, we are saved, we are forgiven, we are made right with Him, and we have an inheritance waiting for us. That's the gospel truth, and our enemy wants us to doubt that.

Here's another lie – one that I suspect we all have heard, and maybe Peter heard as well after he denied Jesus three times.

*You are such a disappointment to God. You have always been a loser and a failure and you still are. You will never change. God has completely given up on you. **How can God ever forgive you?***

I have heard that lie many times, especially after doing the same stupid stuff over and over again. **But what does the Bible say?** We are told in **2 Timothy 1:12**,

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.

God will finish what He started. We gave Him our lives, and He will not give up on us. Then we later read in **1 John 1:9**,

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Do you see why we need to be students of the truth? Do you see why you need to be in the Word of God? If we are not, we are sitting ducks – we are easy pickings for the subtle lies of a very cunning and deceptive enemy.

But Peter isn't finished. Let's look at **verse 9**.

So resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brothers and sisters who are in the world.

Peter tells us to resist Satan, to resist his lies by standing firm in our faith in God, and by taking our stand on the truth of His Word. We resist our enemy by knowing the truth and obeying what we know. Simply put, we trust God and take Him at His Word, trusting that what He says is true. So, we can believe the truth or we can believe a lie. It's as simple as that.

Now, there is something else about this verse which is very important. Peter tells us that we are not alone in our suffering. Others endure the **same experiences of suffering** just like you. Others struggle, others experience pain, others deal with hardship, others have losses just like you. It's such a blessing to know there is someone who has walked in your shoes, so to speak, and can relate to you. It's so encouraging to find others who have gone through what we are going through for hope and inspiration to press on and not give up.

But secondly, there is something else to consider. You might be that person going through the suffering now who will give hope and inspiration to others one day. You are going to be the proof that God will lead you through the storm. People are looking at you.

And one more thing. In this verse, I see the opportunity for another very common and very discouraging lie told by Satan – and here it is.

There is no one who understands what you are going through. You are the only one who suffers like this. No one else has gone through what you are going through. You are all alone.

“*Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen*” is a flat out lie. Satan will get you to think that you’re the only one in the world going through the kind of suffering you’re experiencing. There is no question that we are vulnerable to attacks when we are suffering, but even more so when we are suffering and feel all alone and disconnected from brothers and sisters. Therefore, Satan works hard to isolate us and separate us by convincing us that no one can understand or relate to our circumstances. It’s a lie.

Again, we have a choice. We can believe the truth of God’s Word or we can believe the subtle lies of our enemy.

¹⁰ After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

This is a very hopeful statement where Peter tells us to look beyond our present circumstances to our future, and whether you suffer for one day or one hundred years, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, the truth is your suffering will last only **a little while**.

In the here and now, your suffering may seem intense and it may seem long, but it’s only temporary, it’s only momentary when compared to eternity. There may be pain and sickness in the present, but there’s healing and wholeness that comes later and it’s everlasting. There might be rejection and persecution now, but there’s acceptance and praise that comes later and it’s for eternity. There could be defeat and failure now, but there’s success and victory that comes later and it’s forever. **Psalm 30:5** tells us, **“Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.”** That’s the truth.

On this side of heaven, your suffering may last one day or one hundred years, but in that suffering – by God’s grace, Peter says, *God is at work to **perfect** you, to **confirm** you, to **strengthen** you, and to **establish** you.* God will finish what He started in your life and one day, God’s work in you will be complete.

God is in control, and somehow, some way, God can even use the trouble that Satan brings and God can use the calamity that we might even bring on ourselves for our growth and maturity and for His purpose. And Peter would know that better than anybody. It's the truth.

“My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” is a hymn written by Edward Mote, and it reads like this,

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus' Name.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.
When darkness seems to hide His face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.
His oath, His covenant, His blood,
Support me in the whelming flood.
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my Hope and Stay.
When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh may I then in Him be found.
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.
On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

Source Material:

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