

September 19, 2004
A.M. Service
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Be Careful! Be Alert!”
1 Peter 5:8-9 NLT

8 Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. 9 Take a firm stand against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

“Uh –oh, you’re not going to speak on the devil are you? Do you really believe in the devil?” The answer is yes and I do! I think the devil is taking lightly for the most part even by Christians. On the other hand some blame him for everything from their recent stomach flu to their latest lose of temper.

A little boy always went next door to play even though his mom had warned him against doing so. This worried his mom so badly that she asked him why he was so disobedient.

He replied that Satan tempted him so bad and he did not know what to do.

His mom then advised him to say 'get behind me Satan' whenever he was tempted. She then built a fence around the house.

This worked for a week, then one sunny afternoon his mom looked out the window and there was her son playing on the neighbors lawn having cut a hole in the fence.

"Jeremiah", she yelled, "come here!" She then said "did I not tell you to say 'get behind me Satan' whenever he tempted you?"

"Yes", the boy replied, "I said, 'get behind me Satan', then he went behind me and pushed me through the hole in the fence."

It seems that it is easier for people to believe in God or in angels than it is to believe in a devil. I don't know why because the devil does a lot more advertising. Even Christians do not think much about the spiritual battle that is going on behind the scenes and the part Satan plays in the things happening in our lives.

Peter speaks to us from his own experience with the devil. He had denied the Lord Jesus, which Jesus told him would happen. Jesus also told him that after he repented he should pass on to others what he learned from the experience. In Luke 22:31-32 (NIV) Jesus said to Simon, Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

WHAT DEVIL?

Peter says (1 Peter 5:8), “Be careful, watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy.” Peter is letting us know indirectly that our enemy’s - The devil’s - first line of attack is to have us think he is not really there. You can’t do battle against something that does not exist. But what God is telling us though Peter is that our life *is* under Spiritual attack. And notice who He says is under attack, not non-believers but Christians (v9), “Remember that your *Christian brothers and sisters* all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.” Peter insists that believers are under unseen attack. He says, “Watch out for attacks from the Devil, ... He prowls around (he is busy, stalking us, just waiting for an opportunity) ... looking for some victim to devour (swallow up - destroy).

WHAT THE DEVIL DOES:

He is called the devil (false accuse, liar, slander), our great enemy (adversary, in opposition to us, fighting against us – a reminder that we are in a war, we have a battle to fight), Roaring lion looking for some victim to devour (destroyer, his purpose is our ruin).

Augustine says, "Christ is called 'a lion' (Rev 5:5) because of his courage: the devil (is called 'a lion'), because of his ferocity. The one lion comes to conquer, the other to hurt."

Peter speaking from experience warns us to “be careful, watch out for attacks from the devil.” Be careful, be alert the devil wants to lie, hurt and devour.

Pastor Nick reminded me the other day that every time we get started with another season of Alpha bad things happen. This new season was no exception. The purpose of Alpha is to present the basics of the Christian faith. The enemy does not want us to tell others about Christ. He starts to attack. He will do things that will intimidate you. Either through physical things that happen to you or by the thoughts he puts in your head. (Like, “you blew it again, God has had it with you, you might as well forget trying to follow Him.”)

He will try to cause division and misunderstandings. When these things are happening we don’t tend to think about the enemy, we don’t even bring up the devil as a cause. If it is brought up it is often dismissed. We explain everything at a human level. We must be careful because when you ignore the enemy he takes more ground. The devil loves to blame everything on us and get us to feel hurt, angry, resentful, suspicious and misunderstood.

And he does not want you to talk to the one who has hurt or upset you. When there is a war one of the first things each side wants to do is to take out the other’s line of communication. And the devil does the same thing. He does it in the church, he does it in your marriage and in any relationship he wants to destroy. The devil’s tactic is to divide and conquer.

As much as you may love your spouse the enemy can easily get you thinking things like, “my spouse is making a fool of me, they don’t love me,” or “I hate when they do that (whatever *that* is).” And in a second you can have thoughts of divorcing this person a few seconds before you loved. Communication would help and your enemy knows that so he wants to keep you from talking about it – divide and conquer is his strategy. When we were a young married couple I noticed that my wife would buy new clothes and not tell me. And I began to think, “she is sneaking out to buy these things, spending our money, not telling me and hiding the clothes she’s buying so I wouldn’t know about it.” I would get so angry with her, but not tell her about it. Well, one day I noticed something new and I blurted my accusations in anger. That’s what happens, instead of communicating with love and understanding at the right time, we let anger build up then attack, which puts the other person on the defensive. They attack back and the problem rather than being solved, causes even more separation. After I had made a fool of myself accusing my wife, the one I love with all my heart, of being a sneak; she, with hurt feeling said something like, “That’s not what I’m doing. I wouldn’t foolishly spend our money and hide it from you. It’s just that I like it when I wear something new and you notice it.” To which I replied, rather sheepishly, “Oh!” So now I’ve learned rather than hearing, “What, did you buy another new outfit! What do you think I am made out of money?” She’d rather hear, “Is that new, hon? Wow, you look great in that!” More importantly I have *tried* to learn to sit and communicate when something is on my mind rather than give the enemy a foothold. (Eph 4:26-27) "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

(NLT) And "don't sin by letting anger gain control over you." Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a mighty foothold to the Devil.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE DEVIL:

Resist him.

Take a firm stand against him, but notice that we are not told to rebuke the devil but to resist him. Resistance is closely connected with humble submission to the reliance upon God. By the grace of God take a firm stand against the devil. Here’s How:

1. First by being self-controlled and alert (be careful, watch out).

When you are at war you are on alert. Right now our country is on alert to possible terrorist attacks. Our country wants us to watch out for any signs of potential problems. When I was in the Army there were times when we would be on “alert.” We would be in full combat gear and stationed at strategic areas and be on guard to any attacks by the enemy. Soldiers have to be alert when they are on the battlefield. They need to be levelheaded; they certainly should not be under the influence of anything that might prevent them from being levelheaded, self-controlled or alert. They must be vigilant, attentive to any movement of the enemy. Part of that is knowing the enemy and his schemes. This is what we have discussed already. He wants to believe he does not exist or to take him lightly. He is a liar, a false accuser; don’t listen or dwell on the thoughts he

brings to mind. He wants to have you believe God will not forgive you, or does not love you, or that you are unworthy in some way. He will try to cause division, misunderstanding and break down communication. The enemy will try to intimidate you by his attacks. He will try and get you to make a deal with him, don't cut a deal instead resist him by being self-controlled and alert.

2 Be strong in faith.

Do the things that will build your faith. Bible reading, study, meditation, prayer, making time to be with the Lord, having a quiet time with God whenever and wherever you can. Belonging to a church and church attendance, these are ways of keeping your faith strong. Faith comes from hearing the Word of God and the Word of God is what Jesus used to resist the temptations of the devil. Cling to the truth and not the lies.

Don't be shaky about what you believe, study and know. Bad doctrine, being wrong about what the Bible actually says and teaches gives the devil territory to attack. And live what you believe. Be obedient to God even when it is hardest to do so, even when you don't feel like obeying Him. Self-control because of a strong faith will help you resist the enemy.

James 4:7 "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Yield to God in all things, yield to the devil in none. You are to resist and oppose him in whatever way he may approach you, whether by allurements, by flattering promises, by the fascinations of the world, by temptation, or by threats.

3. Remember that other Christians are tempted in the same way you are.

(9) Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

Remember what Paul wrote in a verse we studied together not too long ago:

1 Cor 10:13 NLT -But remember that the temptations that come into your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will keep the temptation from becoming so strong that you can't stand up against it. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you will not give in to it.

Your situation is not unique. To fail to recognize this is to open the door to self-pity and despair. To recognize it can lead to hope and strength.