

Title: The Fight is On
Date: December 9, 2018
Subject: Suffering is part of the spiritual battle with the devil.
Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8 - 14

Imagine going on vacation to a semi-isolated condo in the mountains. The brisk morning air you've taken your sweet time to appreciate because you slept in. A gentle breeze rustles the leaves. You can make out the ripples of the nearby stream and the chirping of the birds. Peace. Quiet.

The reality is your neighbors were up before the crack of dawn. They've been running their ATVs at full throttle up and down the driveway, right past your rental and somehow manage to get their high beams to shine through your windows. You might not have noticed if they hadn't decided to have their heavy metal grunge band play some tunes while they ride.

That's kind of the way God sets up the last verses of 1 Peter 5. There's the calming influence of 5:7 – God... cares...for...you. We can kind of go boneless like a cat who's completely relaxed in its owners lap. And then... BOOM. Time to wake up to face the music.

READ 1 Peter 5:8-14.

I. Believers are in the middle of a spiritual battle

A. The enemy is named. The identity of the enemy isn't difficult to determine. It's not flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12). The Bible unequivocally pronounces the devil as the enemy of God and those who follow the Lord. He goes by different aliases – Satan, Lucifer, the destroyer, the slanderer and even angel of light. He's a very real spiritual being. He doesn't want people to take him seriously. He hopes people will either view him as the fellow in a red suit, with horns, long tail, holding a pitch fork, or, if people have to attribute evil to something, they'll take the "d" off his name and just refer to evil as a force. A lot of "enlightened people" buy into that notion with things like karma, rotten luck. None of this nonsense about an actual devil.

The devil is real and he is proud of himself. It's all about self. He plotted to be like God and was expelled from heaven. He continues his revolt against the Almighty God and sees people as an opportunity to get back at God. Just as Satan is the polar opposite of God so is his plan for people.

B. The enemy wants to devour people. The devil is compared to a lion. Lions want to eat. The devil wants to eat. Lions roar when pursuing their prey as a frightened prey is easier to catch. The devil seeks to frighten. Once the prey is caught, the lion roars to announce his victory. The devil is loud.

He wants to take people away from God. He seeks to deceive (Genesis 3:1) us into thinking we're self-sufficient and should be the ruler of our destiny. He does this by toying with the truth, otherwise known as lying (John 8:44). He appeals to pride so we'll think we don't need God. Many successful people feel that way.

He uses the same approach when a person suffers. He inserts thoughts of self-preservation. He tempts

people with thoughts the Lord doesn't care and the oh so obvious evidence is suffering. The devil seeks to show himself as more powerful than God. He presented himself that way to Jesus during his 40 days of temptation and suffering when he falsely stated he could deliver all the kingdoms of the world to Jesus if Jesus would worship him and give him the glory. He's active, aggressive and dangerous.

When big game hunters are allowed to go on lion hunts, guides advise the hunter to keep shooting until the lion stops moving. They're considered dangerous until that point. A wounded lion is more dangerous. Satan is wounded and is bent on hurting, harming, destroying and devouring.

II. The battle plan for fighting

God provides strategies and weapons for the fight.

A. Be self-controlled and alert. Most translations term it as having a sober mind and being alert. Now where did we hear that before? Back a few verses in 4:7 where the call to being sober and alert is so believers can pray. Now it's because of the enemy of our souls.

I found a good description of what it's like to not be spiritually sober. "A spiritual intoxicant is anything that creates apathy in your spiritual life and draws you away from God. It includes loving the things of this world and pursuing them, it includes addictions to sin that keep you from properly viewing people and the things of God" (Gregory Brown, How Healthy Churches Resist the Devil, bible.org).

We're to be free from those things that could cloud our mind and diminish our focus. We are to be alert, awake, and vigilant, have our head on a swivel. When I went deer hunting I was concerned deer might sneak past me. Sure there were some trails I focused but those grey ghosts didn't always follow the proscribed paths. So I'd invariably keep moving my head back and forth, slowly spin around, and then spin some more. It helped when dad built a raised hunting blind, affectionately known as "the shack." He attached old auto mirrors so we wouldn't have to turn around so much. He also installed a charcoal burner made from silo blower pipes and a downspout for the chimney.

As Peter wrote about being alert he probably recalled Jesus' statement that Satan asked to sift the disciples like wheat (Luke 22:31-32). The disciples failed the test when Jesus took them to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Matthew 26:36-46). He asked them to pray for him while he went ahead a little farther to be alone. Jesus came back to the group and found they'd fallen asleep, not once, not twice, but three times. After the last time, the Savior asked, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." They weren't alert to the danger.

We're not to be surprised by the enemy's attacks. We're need to be aware that there will be difficulty and suffering. We're not give in to the devil's schemes.

B. Resist. We resist by standing firm in the faith. We're to maintain our footing on the solid foundation. Have you ever participated in a contest to see who can stand or hop on one leg the longest? It doesn't take long before the contestants get wobbly and put down the second foot or fall. It gets more interesting and shortens the contest if there's a provoker who's allowed to tickle the participants. Change the rules of the game to make

it a contest to see who can stand the longest while on two feet. It wouldn't make the highlights on ESPN. "Smith is looking good at the 3 hour mark. So is Johnson. The air is tense as they talk smack...."

Believers are to have both feet down. When they only have one foot down they start to get wobbly. They waver and risk falling for false teaching and lies from the devil.

How stand firm in the faith? Focus on the basics and essentials of the faith – Christ is God, entered humanity, lived a perfect life, died as a sacrifice for sins, was buried, rose from the dead, in heaven now, will return to take his people to heaven to reign with him forever. Focus on the equipment that builds up and enables to grow spiritually – regular eating from God's Word. The teaching at youth group was on the importance of the Bible – how it came to be, what gain from reading it, how to read. The question came up about what percent of people frequently read the Bible. The guesses were pretty generous. On the way home Gloria was listening to VCY and heard them talk about the subject. She sent me a text that I shared with the students who were still hanging out. The amazing thing is that I know how to text. The stat is: 9% read the Bible daily. I miss some days. I don't think the percentage would be much higher if it was 5 days a week.

Other equipping tools are worship, prayer, fellowship, desire to live holy lives.

Palmer Chinchin took a trip with his brothers to raft the Zambezi River in Zimbabwe. The starting point is the base of Victoria Falls where the river rushes through the gorge creating the world's largest rapids. The highest-class you're allowed to raft in the US is a Class 5. The Zambezi's is as high as 8. The guide of their raft told them, "WHEN the raft flips" not "IF the raft flips." "WHEN the raft flips stay in the rough water. You'll be tempted to swim toward the stagnant water at the edge of the banks. Don't do it. Because it's in the stagnant water that the crocs wait for you. They are large and hungry. So WHEN the raft flips, stay in the rough water" (Palmer Chinchin, *True Religion*, pp. 55-57). That's good advice for our spiritual lives. When suffering comes don't try to swim to the stagnant water because that's where the devil is lurking.

C. We find encouragement in the lives of others. V. 9 states that people all over the world - brothers and sisters in the Lord in Russia, Iraq, South Africa, Venezuela, Mongolia - suffer for Jesus. Other people face similar struggles. So do the people next to you. Suffering isn't unique, unusual or unfortunate.

Earlier in our study of 1 Peter I shared the story of Lehman Strauss and his wife who was paralyzed. Here are other lessons he learned as he took care of her. "I was reminded that nothing unique had happened to Elsie and me. Our trial was a common one. I have learned since then that in the United States more than 500,000 people each year have a stroke... Because we are God's children, and because He permitted the trial, I knew He would also provide for our every need. His fidelity and faithfulness were my guarantee. This is not the mere figment of my imagination but the glorious fact that God has been with me to keep me from being overwhelmed by the trial. God is faithful...God does what He wants to do, when He wants to do it, in the way He wants to do it, for the purpose He wants to accomplish, and involves any person or persons He chooses to use...Every afflicted Christian should bow to the absolute sovereignty of God and surrender to Him the right to do what He chooses to do, whenever He chooses to do it, in any way He chooses to do it, for any purpose

He wants to accomplish, and to use any person He chooses” (From the series: In God's Waiting Room, "Learning Through Suffering" – Great Moments in Marriage and Then; God is in Control, bible.org).

It's not quite “misery loves company” but the idea if others can make it through suffering, so can we. Peter names people who've been helpful to him. Each suffered. There was a Silas who traveled with Paul and was thrown in prison for the faith. This may be the same man. Mark wasn't willing to suffer at one point. He left Paul and returned home. Later Paul said that Mark was useful as the young man had grown in his faith and endured difficulty. The identity of “she who is in Babylon” is unknown. The best guesses are it's Peter's wife, the church in Rome or the church in Jerusalem. The secretive wording is meant to protect those who are suffering or would if their identities were revealed. The point is these people have chosen to stand for Christ and communicate that it's worth it and encourage others to do the same.

III. The Lord rewards the victors

A. The rewarder is identified. Many attributes could have been chosen. One that people who suffer might choose is his power, specifically in order to blow Satan to bits and put an end to him and his afflicting ability. That's not the one that's emphasized. It's his grace. It's God's basic nature of love. He is love. He is mercy. He is kindness. He is grace. It's the character trait that draws us to him.

B. The rewarder acts. God gives his grace in Christ – God's Riches at Christ's Expense. It's personalized when we come to faith in Christ. We understood who he is and what he came to do and put our personal faith in him. While he gives grace when we suffer, the focus of God's grace is his calling us to his eternal glory. It's looking to the future when he shares all of who he is. It will last forever as it's eternal.

A peregrine falcon can reach speeds of up to 240 miles per hour while diving. Imagine it could keep up that speed. The moon is 240,000 miles away. It would take 1000 hours to fly to the moon. That's six weeks and that little bird's wings would be flaming. Another 6 weeks for the return trip. In a year it would be able to take 4 plus trips. Imagine we could instruct the falcon to pick up a grain of sand in its beak, fly to the moon and drop it off. 12 weeks later it would pick up a second grain of sand, to the moon and back. Use it to empty the backyard sandbox. When it's done with that take it out to Long Lake. When it's done there go down to Key West Florida. Have it go up and down the Atlantic Coast all the way up to Maine and the Gulf Coast all the way to Texas. When done there tell the bird there's this little thing called the Sahara Desert. If it were possible to do all the math in years, that would be the beginning of eternity.

There's a timing issue with the next element of God's giving. V. 10 says “after you have suffered for a little while.” How temporary is a little while? Is it the entirety of life on earth or is it a part of our time line? We'd like it to be the smaller. Most likely it's comparing our lifespans with eternity. The imagery continues. Certainly heaven will bring the full expression of these elements of restoration.

Restore pictures a boat or fishing nets being repaired. The next two promises are similar and speak of strengthening of the person. The last is being solidly anchored to the foundation. The Lord will restore us to

our original nature in the image of God, will fully indwell us and permanently connect us to Christ. For all that God does we are to worship him.

There's one last encouragement to stand fast in the faith. Don't waver, topple or wander. Keep both feet firmly rooted in the grace God gives. When Jesus brought up the subject of suffering in the Beatitudes he paired it with the good news that those who go through suffering for his sake will be blessed.

Elizabeth Hanson faithfully served the Lord for years as a medical missionary in Central Africa. When a group sought to overthrow the government Westerners were at risk. One night rebels broke into her room and raped her. She cried out to the Lord, "Why are You allowing this to happen to me?" She recalls that the Lord replied in an almost audible voice, "When you chose to follow Me, you gave me not only your mind and heart, but your body. They aren't just doing this to you, but to Me. I'm with you." She rarely shared the story but years later she was in the US lecturing on a technical medical subject when she felt the Holy Spirit leading her to tell her story. She did and then went on with her lecture. Afterwards, everyone left except two young girls. The older girl came up and said, "That's my 13 year-old sister. Two months ago she was raped in the park and hasn't spoken since." Elizabeth's eyes and those of the young girl met and filled with tears. They embraced, wept, and talked for two hours. Elizabeth led her to Jesus Christ and she is serving Christ because Elizabeth Hanson was strengthened and anchored to the foundation in Christ through her suffering and let God use her painful experience to minister to others

The last directive has to do with our fellow travelers to heaven. We are to love each other. The social expressions of love vary across time and people groups, but the truth remains that we all need love. And we need to show love. It's not a one way street. And we don't wait for the other to show it. Love one another and all the more as we see the day of Christ's return getting closer.

The 77th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor during WWII was commemorated on Friday. It was the pivotal moment that brought the US into the war to come alongside Great Britain who was essentially fighting alone. Then Prime Minister Winston Churchill sought to rally his nation before a strategic moment. "Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. If we fail. And conquer we must and conquer we shall, the world will be plunge into the abyss of a new dark age...Therefore let us be to our duties, so that if the British Empire lasts for a thousand years, it will be said, "This was their finest hour.""

Jesus has conquered the devil but delayed his punishment. In the meantime, he's active like a roaring lion who seeks to devour and destroy. We're engaged in a battle against him, a battle whose victory is assured but need to keep on fighting. The stakes aren't the total downfall of civilization. They're actually much worse – the fate of the souls of men, women and children and our beneficial use to the Lord. What will be said of us in our faith against the devil?