

Luke 4 8-19-18

The Greatest Battle, Part Three: The Greatest Weapon

I just read that Microsoft users experienced problems in 2002 due to a network administration program known as Security Administrator Tool for Analyzing Networks (SATAN). According to news reports, computers “possessed” by SATAN performed slowly and caused numerous malfunctions. You see? Satan is always causing problems. He is a real and present enemy now, just as he was for Jesus two thousand years ago. Because of that, we have spent the last two weeks considering the enemy of our souls, celebrating our champion who defeated him and figuring out how to be like Jesus in our encounters with the tempter and deceiver. Let’s do that one more time from Luke 4:**1-13** *Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led around by the Spirit in the wilderness² for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And He ate nothing during those days, and when they had ended, He became hungry.³ And the devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”⁴ And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone.’”⁵ And he led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.⁶ And the devil said to Him, “I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.⁷ Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.”⁸ Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”⁹ And he led Him to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here;¹⁰ for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’¹¹ and, ‘On their hands they will bear You up, So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”¹² And Jesus answered and said to him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”¹³ When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time.*

I remember a time when my friend Stan helped me remove an old, broken dishwasher. As I pulled that thing out I saw behind it a spider, a giant spider. At first I thought it might be a lobster, but it was just a huge spider. And I decided right away to kill it. Now, I know, spiders kill other pestier bugs, but this size spider could walk off with my dog. So, I determined to exercise my God-given dominion over the creatures and terminate its existence. But how? I tried to squish it with a broom but it was too quick. Stan tried the same thing and it just started running up the broomstick,

and Stan, the coward, drops the broom. What next? Do I try a mousetrap? What would tempt a spider? And a mousetrap would only break a leg anyway. Someone said, *Try some Raid*. This guy had not seen this spider. This kind of spider sniffs Raid at their parties. The only way Raid would help is if I hit it with the can. I was at a loss to find the ideal spider weapon. I don't know how to fight giant spiders. They are tough opponents. So is the devil. And Satan is infinitely more dangerous. In battle with him we cannot afford to lose. But how do you fight him? What is the best weapon? Do you quote poetry at him? *Satan, Satan go away. Come again some other day*. Do you hold out a cross and genuflect? What do you do?

In answering that question we again find help from our story of the temptations of Jesus. Here in what I have called *The Greatest Battle*, the confrontation of the Son of God with the devil we find the Greatest Warrior defeating the Greatest enemy with the greatest weapon, which is --- the word of God. The word of God, the Scriptures, becomes the sword of the Spirit in the hand of Jesus and with it he fights off the attacking devil.

The concept of the Bible being our sword is fairly popular among Jesus people. When I was growing up we used to have sword drills in Sunday School. Remember those? The instructor would call out a verse and the first student to find it read it and got a point. So, how many of you brought your swords this morning? If not, we have provided an abridged sword in your bulletin. It is in Ephesians 6 that the Bible is called the sword of the Spirit, in a section dealing with our spiritual armor. Ephesians 6:**10-13** *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.* There is a spiritual armor that protects the child of God from Satan's attacks. Paul describes these here: the shield of faith, buckle of truth, helmet of salvation and the last one is in **17** *the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*. A sword is both an offensive and a defensive weapon. And it is a most valuable item for a man in a battle. Our Lord in Luke 4 was in a battle, a struggle with the forces of wickedness and what was his weapon? The word of God, the sword of the Spirit. And in the example of Christ we have a beautiful less on how to wield this mighty sword. Let's go back there and learn as we watch the greatest warrior take up the greatest weapon.

Our calling as Christians is to imitate Christ and, as we go over this passage one more time, consider how we can imitate Christ in three ways. First, we imitate Christ by using the sword. All the weapons in the world, stockpiled ten miles high will do no good until they are used. A sword in its sheath doesn't cut anyone. But Jesus here draws His sword and prepares for battle. In verse 3 the devil attacks but Jesus counters in verse 4 with a thrust of His sword, *It is written*. This is a statement of authority, and Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8 when He says *man shall not live by bread alone*. Then He goes on to quote Deuteronomy 6, 8 *It is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only*. Satan draws back. And when He next attacks He does so with a spiritual scimitar, a scimitar is like a sword but its blade is crooked and bent. Satan quotes Scripture but distorts it and so Jesus, using the straight-edged blade of the truth in verse 12 penetrates the devil's calloused skin and sends him off licking his wounds. The greatest Warrior, victorious, because He used the greatest weapon.

The man or woman who is in battle, who is in spiritual combat, needs the weapon of God. Can you relate to this idea of struggling with the forces of darkness? And, if not, could it be that is a result of having sold out to it? The man who is at peace with God will be forever at war with the devil and will forever need the Spirit's armor. Our Master used it. Jesus heard the voice of Satan. Hearing that voice is unavoidable, but Jesus talked back to the devil. AW Tozer wrote a book by that title – *I Talk Back to the Devil*. Jesus did that and He talked back with the words of Scripture. That is our Lord's weapon, His blade, His bazooka. Look at how Jesus is described in Revelation 1:16 *In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword*. According to the imagery, in His mouth is a sword and what is it? What does that symbolize? The word of God that fills His mouth and pours forth from His mouth. Revelation 19:15 *From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty*. And then, six verses later, speaking of the beasts from hell it says Revelation 19:21 *The rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse*. This image of the sword of the spirit is consistent throughout Scripture.

So, here's the big question for us. How important then is the Bible for the follower of Christ? Critical. Jesus, remember, was full of the Holy Spirit when He met Satan but that didn't mean He fought him barehanded. Even the Spirit-filled man picks up the word of God. In fact, the Spirit specifically leads a man to use the sword. Don't ever contrast then the man of the word with

the man of the Spirit. Here in Luke 4 the Spirit-filled man, three times, quotes Scripture. In Ephesians God says to us, Ephesians 5:**18** *be filled with the Spirit*. In Colossians, in the exact same context, God says, Colossians 3:**16** *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you*. When you compare Ephesians 5 to Colossians 3 you see the results of the one are the same as the other. The man filled with the word or the man filled with the Spirit, manifests thanksgiving, sings praises to God, and obeys those in authority. Don't divorce word and Spirit. Someone said *If you have the Spirit without the word you blow up. If you have the Word without the Spirit you dry up. If you have both you grow up*. The Jesus of whom we read is a man of the Spirit and a man of the book. We get to imitate Him in using the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Okay then, using the word of God, wielding the sword of the Spirit, is a good thing. We see Jesus doing just that. But, before you can use the word of God in spiritual battle you must first, what? You must first know it. When you read the records of the life of Jesus you encounter a man who is steeped in the Scriptures. At age twelve He stayed late at church in theological discussions with the pastors. When He teaches or is hanging out with Satan, He likes to say, *It is written*, after which He would quote some portion of Scripture. God's word filled His mind and came out of His mouth. And you, you, not your preacher, you are wise to learn the word of God in order to argue effectively with Satan. Are you learning your Bible? Getting familiar with your weapon? What is its place in your life, in your home? Does it sit out and gather dust? Jim Elliot, the martyred missionary said, *The condemnation of Americans will be written in their check books and the dust on their Bibles*. Ouch! But, if the battle is real and raging, the sword of the Spirit must not be on our shelves but in our hands and in our heads and in our hearts. Don't depend on what you learned in Sunday School many moons past. Keep your sword sharp by the continual application of it to your mind.

Sadly, so many American church-goers are biblically illiterate. I know of one pastor who was candidating at a church that was considering him as their next pastor. They were treating him real nice and one deacon offered to show him the Sunday School classes. They went into the middle-school boy's class and the visiting pastor asked these boys, *Fellas, who broke down the walls of Jericho?* The boys just shrugged. So, they went on to look at some other classes. When they were done all the deacons had gathered to speak with the pastor. One stood up and said, *Pastor, it has come to our attention, that there appears to be a problem with some broken walls. We just want you to know that we're sure our fine boys did not break those walls. We don't know*

who did it, but never mind cause we just approved any money you need to get those walls fixed.

That's funny – but the problem it describes is not. Hosea 4:6 *My people perish for lack of knowledge.* It is as true today as ever. But, if you go online, if you look at Facebook or Twitter or visit the websites of our churches it seems they are all alive and vibrant. I know of one church that advertises itself as *the most exciting church in Central Florida*. But you can have an exciting church, an emotional church, a busy church and it won't bother the devil one bit if people are not getting equipped with the truth of God to do battle with the forces of deceit. Just think. Satan is the deceiver. That is his primary role. He is the father of what? Of lies. So, what is the best way to fight lies? With the truth. Mercy is great. Compassion is important. Love is essential, but none of those things will make a lasting difference if they get unhinged from the truth. Jesus said in John 8:32 (ESV) *You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.* Free. Free from the deceiver, the deception, the darkness. Nothing else can do that. This is why we must be people of the book. John Wesley delighted to call himself a *man of one book*. Of the Bible he said, *Oh give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! Let me be homo unus libri, the men of one book*. Charles Haddon Spurgeon was so convinced that we need to be immersed in the Scriptures that he said, *It is blessed to eat into the very soul of the Bible until, at last, you come to talk in scriptural language, and your spirit is flavoured with the words of the Lord, so that your blood is Bibline and the very essence of the Bible flows from you.* This kind of immersion into the word of God will prove exceedingly helpful when dealing with the wiles of the enemy.

So, when pastors who are charged by God with the duty of feeding the flock fail to teach the Scriptures they effectively disarm the sheep, leave them helpless in the presence of Satan and his wolves. This is why, if you find yourself in a church where the Scriptures are not being taught faithfully, it is best to saturate that church with your absence, and get somewhere the saints are being trained to use the sword of the Spirit.

Ephesians 4:14-15 *We are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up.* Unless you are grounded in the Bible, unless you know the book, you are like a sail flapping in the wind, blown about by human opinion. You are a sitting duck for the prince of darkness. Jesus was Victor, in part, because He knew the word and I admonish you to learn the Scriptures, to know the sword of the Spirit so that you may stand firm.

Beyond knowing it, if one is to wield it as the Spirit's sword one must remember the word when it is needed. It is possible for a soldier to enter combat well-equipped, but to fly off in a rage and forget to use the sword hanging from his belt. The truth, said Jesus, will set you free, but you must remember the truth. It is essential that we bring the truth into the moment of temptation. You may know the verse that says, *Be slow to speak and quick to listen*, but will you remember it when your spouse takes a verbal jab at you? The boxer, Mike Tyson, once said, *Everybody has a plan till they get punched in the mouth*. Hmm. Under pressure, in pain, we may forget our resolutions, our best intentions. Maturing in faith means that we more and more bring our biblical principles with us into the pain, into the pressure. Key to doing that is having those principles deeply engrained. It is also wise to put people around you who will remind you of the truth in those critical moments. But often we are alone when temptation comes strong, so prepare yourself, train yourself to pull out that sword and walk in obedience and victory.

Jesus did this perfectly. Three times Satan attacked. Three times Christ responded with just the right verse. He brought out what He knew when He needed it. This is one way Scripture can serve us. It can keep us from sin – at least it can if you have it readily accessible. That's why David said, Psalm 119:**11** (ESV) *I have stored up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You*. What does that suggest you should do before the moment of temptation? Store up that word. Get it in your mind, in your heart. This is one reason Scripture memory is a wonderful discipline. You put the word on permanent file so it is there when you need it.

Bringing the truth into the moment of temptation is key. I have known I Peter 2:20 for a long time, but I was very aware that God brought it to mind recently just as I needed it. I was being criticized – I thought unfairly – and as I was listening to the critic, for once I was not planning a defense, but instead thinking on I Peter 2:**20-21** *For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. 21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps*. Verse 23 says **23** *while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously*. Meditating on that verse, thinking of my Lord, put my heart at rest and made my voice quiet and gentle. I pray that would happen with me more.

One thing you can consider doing is to place Scripture strategically around your house, in your car, in your office, maybe even inside your refrigerator or on your computer. If I did that I

would put Psalm 103:1 in my shower so I would wake up with worship, saying, *Bless the Lord Oh my soul; and all that is within me bless His holy name.* On our frig we could have Romans 14:17 *The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.* On my computer screen I could put, Philippians 4:8 *Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.* We don't have a child now, but if you did you could put over your child's door something like Ephesians 6:4 *Do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.* You get the idea? I offer this as a suggestion but do you know that it is a command of God? Deuteronomy 6 gives us the Biblical guide to interior décor. 6:6-9 *These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* All of this is designed to bring the truth of God into the moment of temptation, into the spiritual battle with Satan.

A few more – if you are burdened with guilt there is Hebrews 8:12b *I will remember their sins no more.* If you are prone to self-pity you have Ephesians 1:3 which says we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. If you are anxious there is Romans 8:28 *We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.* If anger is your problem Ephesians 4:31-32 (NLT) *Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words...forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.* There are verses for lust, for greed, for laziness, for lying, for pride. Oh brethren, it is with the sword of the Spirit that the greatest warrior beat back the greatest enemy and it is with that sword that you may do the same. So, let's imitate Christ by using the sword, knowing the sword and remembering the sword. Resist the devil with that glorious weapon, the word of the living God.

Father, forgive us for being foolish soldiers, for neglecting the provisions You have made for our good. Motivate us now to learn Your word and become a people of the book. Then give us that special grace to remember it and obey it in time of temptation. We thank You for the strength and example of Jesus our Savior, in whose victory and in whose name we trust and we pray. Amen