

Scripture = 1 Peter 5:1-14

Psalter Selections = 118B; 118C; 118D; 118E

Introduction: The fourth battlefield, your heart, is the fight of your life. What makes it distinctive is that the LORD God who ordained our union in Christ also delights in communion with His people. The incarnate Son of God, who did not unite Himself with us in our original righteousness, is pleased to do so now in our very imperfect state of sanctification.

This is the fourth of four messages intended to heighten our awareness of God's glory in the salvation of His people through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the midst of all of the sensationalism in this holiday season, we need the sobering sanity of the Scriptures to renew our appreciation of the incarnation of God the Son, and the saving work He accomplished. Where should we begin? Let's begin with a trustworthy statement.

"The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (^{ESV} 1 Tim. 1:15). Who is Christ Jesus, and why did He come to save sinners?

If we trace back the biblical revelation of God's glory by starting with the incarnation of the Son of God, we understand that He had to be like us in every way (Heb. 4:7), except for sin (1 Joh. 3:5), so that He could save from the wrath of God those whom the Father gave to the Son (Joh. 17:24) before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Before creation, God planned for sin and salvation to reveal His glory. Sin reveals the glory of God's wrath. Salvation reveals the glory of God's grace. Salvation also reveals the glory of the Trinity, one God who is Three Persons. God the Father selects specific sinners for whom God the Son actually saves, and to whom God the Spirit seals their salvation. The entrance of sin and salvation indicate "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! ... For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen" (Rom 11:33, 36).

Our communion with God rests upon our union in Christ. Our union with Christ centers on the wonders of God's redeeming grace. This is a doctrinal presentation. Instead of bringing out from a single text the message of God, we want to bring together many texts in order to ponder the immensity of saving grace. The unifying theme is "The Battlefields of Our Salvation."

1. The battle in heaven of angels who rebelled against their Sovereign ...
 - a. Informs us about the beginning of sin, and
 - b. Warns us about the atrocious, deceitful, and disastrous nature of sin, and
 - c. Presents us with the predestining purposes of God the Father.
2. The battle in Eden of perfect parents in a perfect world who disbelieved and disobeyed their Creator places us all under the tyranny of sin and death.
3. The battle in Palestine of rebellious men, led by Satan, against Jesus Christ reveals God's glorious conquest for His elect and the certain damnation of His enemies.
4. The battle in the heart is the contest of fighting the good fight of faith.
 - a. The most dangerous time may be when you feel closest to God.
 - b. Your sincere desire to live for your Lord is about to be assaulted.

Our salvation is revealed in the context of warfare, in the language of the battlefield. To summarize, there are four major battles of our salvation. These battles are:

- a. **The Battle in Heaven** *The Sin of Angels* The Selection of the Father
- b. **The Battle in Eden** *The Sin of Man* The Sin of Humanity
- c. **The Battle in Palestine** *The Cross of Christ* The Salvation of the Son
- d. **The Battle in the Heart** ... *The Triumph of Grace* .. The Sanctification of the Spirit

Outline

- a. The Assault on the Saints
- b. The Assault on the Church
- c. The Attack by the Saints

A. THE ASSAULT ON THE SAINTS

Satan was able to bring down perfect Adam because perfect Adam was not at that time united to the God-man. Satan now cannot realize that imperfect man in union with the God-man, imperfect as we are, cannot be taken by Satan. He never learns so he keeps on trying. Satan cannot realize that every battle that he brings against us, no matter how apparently successful, only promotes our holiness. Noah and Peter illustrate Satan's assault on the saints.

1. Noah illustrates our conflict with sin.

In Genesis 9:20-21, Noah planted a vineyard, drank of the wine, was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. Remember that Noah was described in the Old Testament as a just man, perfect in his generation and that he walked with God (Gen. 6:9). In the New Testament he is described as a preacher of righteousness (2 Pet. 2:5). Three things should be noticed.

First, anyone can sin and everyone does sin as a result of the fall.

Romans 3:10-12 = As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one."

Second, no one is ever past temptation or the need of God's sustaining grace.

Noah was 600 years old when the Flood came. He had lived righteously for a long time. However, in the later years, he mars that earlier record. He is an example that many are strong in living for God when they are young but depart from the will of God when they are older.

Moses sinned late in his 80's by striking the rock and taking some of God's glory to himself.

David sinned with Bathsheba when he was in his 50's.

Solomon departed from the will of God when he was old. Past success does not provide power for future victory.

Third, only the power and grace of God can deliver.

2. Peter illustrates the power and grace of Christ.

When Christ said on that awful night of betrayal, “Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat” (Luke 22:31), Satan was neither bragging nor lying, although Peter he was doing both. If Satan could bring down Adam in all of his perfection and righteousness, Peter would be no match.

Remember how offended Peter was that Jesus thought Peter would deny Him. Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death” (Luk. 22:33). But Jesus said, “I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luk. 22:32).

The only reason, absolutely the only reason, why Satan did not win this battle against Peter in all his weakness as he did against Adam in all his strength, was because Jesus said, “I have prayed for you.” The only reason why Peter and you do not go the way of Judas Iscariot is that Jesus has prayed for you.

John 17:9 = I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours.

Romans 8:34 = Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Hebrews 7:25 = Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Here we are in all our weakness. The thoughts and intents of our heart bother us. We commit sins every day, sins of omission and commission. Our sins rise up against us day by day. We are constantly ashamed of how far off we fall. Yet, Satan cannot get us. He cannot destroy us, rather the opposite. We strengthen others, as Jesus prayed for Peter, “and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren” (Luk. 22:32).

Peter was strengthened by the ordeal, and so are you. We are not able by ourselves to withstand Satan. Peter gives his commentary of the gospel ordeal in his first epistle.

1 Peter 5:8-10 = Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.

Peter was vulnerable in the ordeal and so are you. The time when he was most vulnerable was when he felt closest to Jesus. You do love Jesus, very dearly. You do not think that you are capable of doing the things that Satan would seduce you to do. Peter was foolish but he was not hypocritical. He really did not think he could deny Jesus Christ. He was outraged by the suggestion. He loved Jesus Christ too much.

Another time Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, but shortly was rebuked by Jesus for speaking like Satan (Mat. 16:22-23). Even though Satan makes us stumble, he can never make us fall, and the end result, because our Savior prays for us, is that we will be strengthened and will strengthen others by it.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 = Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

The wrath of men and devils will only work to the praise of God in the assault on the saints.

B. THE ASSAULT ON THE CHURCH

1. It may not look like Satan is defeated. If anything, it looks like he is winning. There seems to be more sin and sadness and suffering than ever. It's true that Satan is doing a lot of damage, but that does not mean he is winning.
2. Illustration: In World War II, Adolph Hitler's doom was certain once the Normandy invasion on D-Day was successful. From that point on, it was just a matter of time. Did Hitler or the Nazis give up? No, they threw everything they had into one last bloody offensive, the Battle of the Bulge, and they killed more people than ever in the death camps. The time between D-Day and final victory was the most terrible time of the whole war, not because Hitler was winning, but because he was doomed.
3. Satan is doomed but not yet gone. When Jesus came the first time in weakness, it was enough to defeat the devil and ensure his doom. When Jesus comes again, in will be in power and glory, with his saints and angels, and the dragon will be cast into the lake of fire. Satan is a defeated dragon, headed for hell, so he's trashing around trying to do all the damage he can in the time he has left. "He is filled with fury, for he knows that his time is short" (Rev. 12:12).
4. To understand the fury of Satan's attacks on the followers of Jesus, you have to know how much Satan hates Jesus. The destroyer hated the One through whom all things were created. The father of lies hates the living Truth. The enemy of our souls hates the Savior of sinners. The prince of darkness hates the Light of the world. The dragon's hatred of Jesus is hot and horrible, and since he can't stop Jesus or wipe out his church, he vents his hatred on as many individual Christians as he can, trying to tempt them, intimate them, and mislead them, so that he can make them as miserable as possible and weaken their witness to others. Be prepared for the dragon's onslaught, but don't be fooled into thinking the devil is winning. [David Feddes, "The Dragon's Defeat," www.btgh.org, Dec. 14, 1997]

5. Satan wants to blind you to the truth. He wants the church to forsake the gospel and follow his lies. What if our church refuses to compromise the truth? Does Satan just give up and take his attacks elsewhere? Not at all. It's often the strongest churches and the most vibrant Christians who are the target of Satan's fiercest attacks.
6. Satan can't destroy a church built on the gospel, but he can try to disrupt it and make it ineffective, especially we are not alert to his schemes. He tries to cause arguments and bitterness and division in the church. He arouses suspicion, distrust, and dissent. These aren't just disagreements or personality conflicts. They are the work of Satan. He wants to rob us of our joy and make us miserable. He wants to disrupt our fellowship and destroy our united witness to the gospel of our Lord. He does all this because he hates the church and fears the gospel. He wants to make every biblical church unpleasant to those inside the church and unattractive to those outside the church.
7. Believer, Satan cannot separate you from God's love or take away your eternal life. However, He will do all he can to weaken your joy and your confidence. He does this out of hatred and sheer spite. He wants you to be so crushed and exhausted that you won't be effective. He doesn't want your joy and assurance to be so contagious that you tell others. Otherwise, they might believe the great news that they can be delivered in Christ and have victory over the devil.
8. No matter what Satan tries, don't give in. Don't let him fool you and defeat you. Satan is hateful, cunning and powerful, but he is also defeated. Jesus is Lord! Satan is strong, but not strong enough. He is scared of Jesus and the gospel. [David Feddes, "The Ultimate Enemy," www.btgh.org, April, 1999] The assault on the church.

C. THE ATTACK BY THE SAINTS

1. The other side of Satan's attack is the attack of the saints. Imperfect saints, in union with the God-man, are on the attack against Satan and an evil world. Jesus said it this way. Matthew 16:18 = And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
2. Gates are defensive weapons. The gates of hell cannot stand against our onslaught when we are led by the Captain of God's hosts. Satan cannot stand against the likes of you when in union with the God-man. Listen to Paul, James, and Peter. Ephesians 6:11 = Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
James 4:7 = Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.
1 Peter 5:9 = Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

3. Fight the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12)

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 = For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Ephesians 6:13 = Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

Conclusion:

1. Here we are in all our weakness, the thoughts and intents of our heart bothering us, we commit sins every day, sins of omission and commission, our sins rise up against us day by day, we are constantly ashamed of how far off we follow -- and Satan cannot get us. He cannot destroy us. Rather the opposite, we strengthen others, as Jesus prayed for Peter, "and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren" (Luke 22:32b).
2. The wrath of man and devils will only work to the praise of God and your sanctification.
3. Here is the drama. Satan in his battle against us in our pristine glory, with every conceivable incentive to persevere in the holiness in which we were created, brought all mankind and us into ruin. But now he can only aid and abet our sanctification and cannot begin to stand against the Church on the march. Why? Because the incarnate Son of God, who had not seen fit to unite Himself with us in our original righteousness, has been pleased to do so now in our very imperfect state of sanctification. The glory is all to Him.
4. Long ago, one silent night, / God revealed His glory bright;
His own image came to man / For salvation's matchless plan.
Jesus, Savior, Shepherd, King -- / Lord of all to You we bring
Praises, wonder, thanks, and love / For this gift from God above.
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5. God is glorified by revealing the triumph of grace in the battle in the heart.

Resource: James M. Boice, Editor, *Our Savior God: Studies on Man, Christ, and the Atonement*, Baker Book House, 1980. Addresses presented to the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, 1977-1979.