

Resisting Satan

M.W. Bassford
3-18-07

Introduction.

- A. As I think I've mentioned before, one of the peculiarities of my family is that my older brother is so much older than I am that in some ways, he's more like an uncle than a brother. He has 13 years on me, and he went to college early, when he was 16 and I was still three. I really didn't see that much of him or spend that much time with him when I was growing up, and to make up for that, whenever he came home from college or the Army, he would take me with him to see a movie. Of all the movies that I went to see with him, perhaps the one that most sticks in my mind is an Arnold Schwarzenegger movie called "The Predator." It might seem kind of an odd choice to take one's 9-year-old brother to see an R-rated movie, but that's my brother for you.
- B. Now, the plot of "The Predator," such as it is, involves a team of American commandos going through the jungle in Southeast Asia. The problem is that they're being stalked by an invisible killer, so members of the team keep on disappearing quietly, only to be discovered five minutes later, gruesomely dead.
- C. I wouldn't recommend that any of you rush out and see "The Predator," exactly, but the movie does provide the best metaphor I've ever seen for the workings of Satan. Satan, you see, is not a stand-up, frontal-attack kind of guy. He doesn't shout "Ready or not, here I come!" when he's about to tempt us. Instead, he's like the Predator. He tries to be as invisible as possible, as subtle as possible, and he only closes in for the kill when nobody can help us, and when we can't help ourselves. The rest of the church only sees the deadly results when the elders tell them that yet another Christian has chosen to leave the Lord.
- D. Satan does this over and over again, as often as he can, and he will only be satisfied when all of us are spiritually murdered. In fact, he is stalking each one of us right now. We need to be aware of this, brethren. We need to be aware of this, and turn to God's word for help in resisting Satan.

I. Satan's Strategy.

- A. Just like God has a plan for getting all of us to heaven, Satan too has a plan for getting us all to hell, and if we want to thwart this strategy, we have to understand what it is. The first step of his scheme is **DISTRACTION**. We see this part of the plan discussed by Jesus in Matthew 13:22. Satan knows that if we are fruitful Christians, if we are dedicated to working for the Lord and serving Him, it will be infinitely harder to entice us to fall away, so one of the first things he wants to do is to make us unfruitful. Jesus here describes one of the main distractions Satan employs: worry. I myself had an encounter with this one a few weeks ago. As most of you probably know, Lauren and I are looking at buying a house soon, and for someone as cautious and conservative as I am, the prospect of making such a large commitment is anything but a comfortable one. I found myself stressing over this repeatedly until one morning I woke up and the thought just popped into my head, "Satan is using this to make you unfruitful." That's exactly what was going on. Satan was using my worry to distract me from serving God. He wants to do this to all of us, and real estate, although a useful instrument for him these days, is far from the only tool in his toolbox. He can distract us with other money worries, with worries about our jobs, with worries about our families, with worries about anything and everything. He doesn't care what. He just wants to get us out of the front line and make us useless.
- B. Interestingly enough, in this same verse, Jesus also brings up another one of Satan's favorite opening moves: **DECEPTION**. The deceitfulness of riches is certainly a favorite, but it's not the only lie that Satan tells. Consider Paul's description of deception in 2 Corinthians 11:3. In context, this is about the deception of false teachers, but it applies generally as well. Satan will do anything he can to lead our minds astray from the simplicity of devotion to Christ. He lies to us inside our heads and tries to persuade us that what is good is actually hateful, and that what is evil is actually desirable. He tries to tell us the Lord's church is a sham and that it is populated by hypocrites. He tries to tell us that being a Christian is one big pointless misery. He tries to tell us that we'll be so much happier and better off if we just follow him into sin. He'll be delighted if we just bolt out the auditorium doors one day and never come back, but that's not really his primary purpose. What he really wants is to corrupt our hearts, knowing that if he succeeds in that, he will have little difficulty corrupting our lives. Once we start believing Satan's deceptions, there may be no outward difference. To others, our lives may appear not to have changed at all. But Satan will be leading us where he wants us to go.
- C. The third step of Satan's plan is **DIVERSION**. Just like the Predator never tried to take on the whole commando team at once, so too Satan prefers not to try to tackle a Christian who is getting lots of support from other Christians. Instead, he wants to lead us away from our brothers and sisters, get us isolated and alone, and THEN strike. Look what happened to the Jewish king Joash after he lost the support of just one man, his mentor Jehoiada. We see the sad story in 2 Chronicles 24:17-18. The point is clear: a servant of God who is alone is a servant of God who is vulnerable and about to fall. This separation can occur in any number of ways. It happens most obviously when we forsake the assembly and stop coming to church

services, but it happens just as often to Christians who still show up in the auditorium sometimes. If we don't know any of our brothers and sisters, if we don't share our lives with them, we are nearly as isolated from our congregation as we would be if we didn't come at all. That kind of isolation, no matter why it happens, is the work of Satan, and if it's true in our lives, it's a sure sign that he's got us about right where he wants us.

- D. The final step of Satan's plan is our spiritual **DESTRUCTION**. Of course, when this happens to men, they are willing accomplices in their own demise, but they are still acting according to the will of Satan. This last stage occurs when a Christian renounces God and returns to the world rather than continuing to live in a righteous way. Once again, this does not necessarily have to be a spectacular occurrence. The spiritually destroyed Christian can continue showing up at church services—indeed, many of the spiritually dead do. What has changed is the lifestyle and the heart. We see Peter's comment on these Christians in 2 Peter 2:20-21. This is the most wretched state in which man can exist. The most hardened sinner can at least repent, but what can be said to the man who knows all about serving God and doesn't want any part of it? The Christian who has reached this point is surely bound for the worst torments that hell can offer, and worse still, he knows it! This is what Satan wants for us. He wants every one of us to be as eternally miserable as he knows he will be.

II. Defenses Against Destruction.

- A. Does this sound like fun to any of us? Do any of us want to allow Satan's plan to run our lives? Do we want to be separated from God and His family, and then be spiritually devoured? If not, we need to pay attention to what the Bible tells us about our defenses against destruction. The first thing we need to do is **STAY FOCUSED**. Consider Paul's comments on this subject in Philippians 3:13-14. Now, Paul was a guy with a lot of earthly problems, not the least of which was that for the last 25 years of his life or so, he had people wanting to kill him! That's the sort of thing that would motivate most of us to worry at least a little bit, but not Paul. He had his eyes on the prize, and there was nothing on earth that was going to keep him out of heaven.
- B. We need to have this attitude. We need to devote ourselves to the Lord's work and not worry about the things that aren't important. Let's make sure we realize what this doesn't mean, though. It doesn't mean that we shouldn't be concerned for the state of others' souls. It doesn't mean that when some tragedy strikes a loved one, we shouldn't mourn. It doesn't even mean that we shouldn't be good, prudent stewards of our earthly possessions. But it does mean this: It does mean that we should seek the kingdom of God first, and trust in the promise of the Lord that all of these other things will be added to us. That's how we can be fruitful.
- C. Second, we need to **STAY WISE**. Satan continually tries to fool all of us, but there is no good reason why any of us should ever listen. We just need to keep one principle in mind. Look at what Deuteronomy 6:24-25 says. Everything that God tells us to do that is in this book is good for us and will bring us joy. Everything that Satan wants us to do that is forbidden in this book is bad for us and will cause us grief. It's that simple. There is no sin that will bring us lasting happiness, ever. Sin ruins people, makes them miserable, and costs them their souls, but it never makes anyone happy. Righteousness is what makes people happy. That means, friends, that if we are faithful servants of God who continually strive to do His will, we are on the mountaintop. We have nowhere in our lives to go but down, and if we start listening to the lies of Satan, down is exactly where we will go. Satan is not our friend. He does not have our best interests at heart. When it looks like he's offering us something for nothing, he's like the drug dealer who gives some poor kid on the playground the first hit of crack for free. Sure, that first taste of the drug of sin might be nice, but we'll never stop paying for it. Let's be wise. Let's see through the lies. Only God desires our good. Satan wants to ruin us.
- D. Third, we need to **STAY TOGETHER**. You ever seen those wildlife shows on PBS or Animal Planet about the mountain goats or the elk or the caribou? Do large herbivores like that roam around by themselves? Of course not! They know that the forests are full of things that want to EAT them, so they stick together for protection. Sure, a wolf or a bear or a mountain lion will happily take on just one mountain goat, but they'll steer clear of a hundred mountain goats. Brethren, what works for the mountain goats works for us too. A church is not first and foremost a social club. It's a mutual defense society. God commands us to come together because He knows that you'll keep Satan off my back if I'll keep him off yours. This begins in the assembly, but it hardly ends there. Look at the words of the Hebrews writer in Hebrews 3:12-13. Each one of us is to watch over not just our own hearts, but the hearts of our brothers and our sisters too. As part of this, we are supposed to encourage one another, not just when we're in this room together, but daily. Let's remember that, friends. That way, Satan won't get our brethren, and he won't get us, either.
- E. Finally, friends, when we get right down to it, what we must determine, deep down in our souls, is that we are going to **STAY FAITHFUL**, that we are never going to leave the Lord, no matter what. Let's look again at the book of Hebrews, and what it says in Hebrews 6:11-12. We need to diligently seek after the hope that God has given us. This is not a hobby. This is the battle we're fighting for our own souls, and the consequences of winning are as wonderful as the consequences of losing are dreadful. We need to patiently, faithfully continue to serve God, because if we don't, we are dead meat. There is nothing, anywhere, that can make rejecting God anything but an insanely bad decision. There is no choice. We must stay faithful.

Conclusion. If you recognize that you've not been faithful to God, it's not too late to repent.