

Faith through the fire part 4: Disarming principalities and powers.

Last time, in a poorly edited and titled paper (should have been titled part 3), we talked about the equipment God has provided, made God-tough. Now I want to consider some truths that help us stand firm in the evil day. I want to focus on two reasons Jesus took on human flesh; to deal with the devil and to become our High Priest, to conquer, liberate and aid.

*“...You have put all things in subjection under his feet.” For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” **Hebrews 2:8b-9***

*“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” **Hebrews 2:14-18***

Satan has many tools he likes to use. As the father of lies, we know that lying is his strong suit. He bakes up lies all the time and too often we believe them. Satan also plays around with truths, spinning them into half-truths seasoned with lies. He will bombard your soul with lies spun out of the very truth you have been taught that should bolster your defences. Truths that don't just keep you safe, but also protect the people on your right and left; up and down the line. “You are not good enough”, “look at what God has said in His book, you can never live up to that!”, “how slow is God to fulfil His promises, do you really think He will be faithful to remember little old you?”, “you're gonna die!”

Remember this is the same creature whose hands were in the fall. He spun the woman around so fast that she went from believing everything God had told her was true to questioning the reality of everything, thinking “wow this poison fruit looks good to eat!”. He shook her worldview from believe that God was good and the creator of good to believing that God was hiding good from her. She was twisted into believe that the God who had made all things and given them as a gift to her and her husband was holding out on her; true happiness was just a bite away. Then, when all is said and done, Satan is the first one to front up to God and accuse you of doing the very thing he enticed you to do. You know, just how we often bait, prod and set others up just to bring them down.

Satan wants you to sin. Sin brings death. But sin isn't the biggest weapon Satan uses; it's the death, destruction and recrimination that follows that he uses to accuse you and your God. Satan knows it, the Bible says it, so what did God do about it? The way Jesus has dealt with the devil, and the fact that He is now our High Priest, are two things that help us as we disarm his lies and twisted truth. But for them to work we must have faith. We have to actually understand, meditate on these ideas and believe them to be true.

The first thing Jesus did was become a man, took on like flesh, to die. Through His death He paid the penalty for all sin; past, present and future. Now that's not just past, present and future in general terms but your past sin, your present sin and your future sin. He has offered the remedy for our sin problem. When Satan tries to accuse us because of our sin our Father responds, "I know, but their big brother dealt with that." Sin is now a personal issue between you and God. It is none of Satan's business. The judicial side of it has been dealt with. So, don't let him get involved and don't leave the door wide open for him to come in and trash the house.

But sin brought death, the club that Satan wielded. Just think about that for a moment, Satan and his cronies entice you and tempt you and lie to you to try to get you to sin. Why do they do it? So, they can club you to death with accusations, guilt and shame. God has set us free from that. How? Not just by paying for all your sin but by making the way possible to offer you the free gift of eternal life. In an act of sheer Krav Maga (Israeli martial arts), Jesus moved into the world, took the blow of sin and stripped the club of death out of Satan's hands.

In Hebrews 2:14 the word translated "destroy" carries with it the idea of bringing something to an end; Jesus "stripping" Satan of his power. What power? The fear of death. How? By the free gift of eternal life. Yes, once more let me draw your attention to Jesus' words to the religious leaders who wanted to kill Him; a group of men caught up in the scenes of the devil, walking according to his path and not God's. Jesus could have said many things to these men, many choice words and accusations which all would have been true. But what Jesus said to them always strikes me and it's why John 5:24 has been a favourite of mine for a long time. Jesus offers them the gift of eternal life.

The only way out of the trap they were caught in was to believe what Jesus was saying. In truth, that's the only way out of any trap that the fallen principalities and powers place in front of you. Not only did they have to believe the words that Jesus was telling them, but they had to believe who it was who had sent Jesus. They had to believe that He was the Messiah the Son of God, sent by the Father, and reject the lie that Jesus was sent by Satan. What lie was Satan whispering in their ears? "I sent Him!"

Any one of those religious leaders who, through the eyes of faith, could see who Jesus truly was and the gift that He was offering could have three things said about them; they would have eternal life, never come into judgement (over life and death) and would have passed, at that moment, from death to life. Nothing strips the power from death like eternal life.

"In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." **Colossians 2:11-14**

"And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." **John 6:40**

A famous preacher once said that Satan carries around a gun that he likes to point at your head to fill you with fear. The trick is to remember that his gun isn't loaded. This principle of disarming through faith over fear, knowing you have eternal life from death, branches out into all areas of our life. From this truth about our new birth, the disarming of fears should permeate everything we think, do, say and, in our hearts, believe.

This principle plays out in a beautifully crafted section in Romans 8:31-38. Zane Hodges penned one of the best translations I have found of this famous section in his book "Romans: Deliverance from Wrath";

"What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who is really against us? He who did not even spare His own Son, but delivered Him up on behalf of us all, how shall He not also graciously give us, together with Him, all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's chosen ones? God is the One who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? Christ is the One who died, and moreover who also rose, who also is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes on our behalf.

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Just as it is written that,

'For Your sake we are put to death all day long, We are accounted as sheep for slaughter.'

On the contrary, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Now the enemy's feeble accusations don't get past our big brother, who is also our high Priest, who also suffered while being tempted just like us. Sorry Satan, no eager or sympathetic ear here for you. Notice this love of God, even in this passage, is in the Father not sparing His own Son but sending Him to pay for sin to make way for the gift of life. There is nothing, not even COVID-19, that can separate us from that love.

Paul doesn't say that bad things won't happen. He doesn't say you won't suffer and face physical death. There is no promise here that you won't lose your income, savings or house. But the life you now have, that eternal life, and the love God has for you will never leave you. If God is for you then no one can be against you. Satan can try but like always he will fail. Don't leave the door open to your house, don't open it to him through your fears. Trust in the life and love of God. After all everything that happens to you can be used for good (Romans 8:28) in God's hands. Remember the man born blind in John 9 was born that way to glorify God. Whatever happens to you in your circumstances can equally bring God glory, if you let it and trust Him and His love.

That's where the second reason Jesus took on human flesh comes in; to be our High Priest. In times of need and fear, we need only take the time to enter boldly into the presence of our High Priest. The one who is there to listen and give aid in our times of need; any day, the evil day, the days ending in "y". When you start to feel anxious, fearful, disoriented by the latest thing to hit you in life, money is running low, just go and speak with Him. Even those things you are shameful of, remember He paid for it. Keep your dialogue with your God open and speak with Him about everything. Yes, I mean everything.

As our High Priest He did something that no other High Priest has even been able to do. He came to the Holy God bringing a sacrifice once for all and then sat down. Jesus didn't need to offer a sacrifice for Himself first because He was perfect. The sacrifice that He brought was for the people and that sacrifice was Himself; making propitiation for the sins of the people, total payment. Now He presides as our ever merciful and faithful High Priest. Having become like one of us, enduring like suffering during His own temptations, Jesus can offer us aid. Another key to disarming the devil is going to Jesus.

"Therefore since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest incapable of sympathising with our weakness, but one who has been tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace whenever we need help." **Hebrews 4:14-16**

The devil and his army have empty guns, don't load them for them. The club of death is stripped from their hands by life in Christ. He gave you life for something; to glorify Him. Don't let a hollow roar from a weak and hungry lion strip you of your confidence in Christ. There is nothing more disarming than people of faith (Hebrews 11).

"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." **Philippians 4:6-7**

"...you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." **John 8:32**

"...Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" **Mark 9:24**

Now it's time to take these ideas and demonstrate their power to the others in the ranks; those who share this life in Christ. The way Christ conducts Himself is an example for us to follow. We should be life giving, need meeting, ever-ready-sympathetic-ear kinds of people. As Christ has empowered us, stripping our enemies, as a great display of love so we should also love one another. Nothing should separate others from the love of Christ we should display toward them, after all they are just like you. This kind of love can strip the fear and anxiety out of others just like it should in you.