



April 8-9, 2017
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

Battle Plan

1 Peter 5:6-11; James 4:7

We come today to the conclusion of our sermon series on spiritual warfare. We have learned that we share this world with spiritual beings; some of them are nasty minions of the chief hooligan whom the Bible calls Satan. But we need not be afraid! In his death and resurrection, Jesus has defeated the Devil. That war has been won. But, like the rattlesnake that keeps biting after his head has been chopped off, **Satan isn't going down without a fight**, which explains the evil that surrounds us. But the good (and surprising news for many Christians) is that Jesus Christ the victor has granted *us* his authority and power! As Holy Spirit-filled followers of Christ, we have authority in the name of Jesus to do battle with our spiritual enemy.

Last week, Pastor Ellis taught us about the importance of not giving the devil a foothold in our lives. Even though we as Christians belong to God, Satan can *still* get a foothold in our lives; a foothold that paralyzes us or renders us less effective in our witness. He illustrated this with a disgusting story about how his dog got sick all over the floor early last Sunday morning and how his automatic vacuum cleaner went to work while they slept, spreading the joy all over their floor. (And by the way, for you Facebook fans who were wondering: *yes*, that really happened to Ellis on the morning he was preaching! If that's not an attack of the devil, I don't know what is!)

Today I conclude by offering a battle plan for dealing with these footholds. I want to acknowledge Pastor Mike Riches whose work on this has been helpful to me. You'll find space in the bulletin to capture five key steps in our spiritual battle plan. I urge you to jot these down, go home, read the passages, and then reflect on how well you are doing in each of these areas.

Our text comes from the 1 Peter 5:6.

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. **Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him...***

I wonder how many of you noticed a news item last week out of Indonesia? A 25 year old man named Akbar was swallowed whole by a python. The snake was 23 feet long! Bite marks suggest that he was attacked from behind as he was harvesting his crops. What a horrible way to die: to be stalked and ambushed by a predator!

Well, that is exactly the language Peter uses to describe the work of Satan. *“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour!”*

He prowls, he sneaks around, sniffs around, looking for someone who is vulnerable. If we don't want to end up as lion food, what can we do? What is our battle plan?

First, **RESIST**. After Peter presents his “roaring lion” image, his very next command is, “Resist him!” Face him down! Peter and his buddy James must have talked about this, because it is exactly the language James uses in *his* letter.

*“Submit yourselves therefore to God. **Resist the devil**, and he will flee from you...”* James 4:7

The first and essential step in every spiritual battle with the devil is **resist him!** What are the options? Turn tail and run? Bury your head in the sand? Cross your fingers and hope for the best? Most of us live in a state of spiritual denial. Even if we experience attacks that seem focused, more vicious, more relentless than normal, we still prefer to deny or avoid or run away. Peter says, “Don't do it. When you encounter the devil in all of his nastiness—however scary he might be, however loudly he might roar—don't let him intimidate you! Resist him. Fight back.”

When Pastor Larry taught on the Armor of God, he mentioned something very important: *The armor only protects the front!* It is only when you are facing your enemy—advancing on your enemy—that the armor provides protection. If you turn tail and run, you are more vulnerable to attack. Remember poor Akbar? Ambushed from behind. That won't happen if you courageously face the Devil head on. And by the way, do you notice what happens when we *do* resist the devil? It's the same response of most bullies when you stand up to them. What? They run away. James says, *“Resist the devil, and **he will flee from you!**”*

Palm Sunday is a perfect illustration of this point. Jesus could have stayed in Galilee where it was safe and he was popular. But the Devil was prowling and growling in Jerusalem. Jesus took the fight to him. He resisted! So must we!

RESIST. And then **REPENT**. Let me read a little more from James:

*Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. **Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.***

Last week, Ellis pointed out that one of the ways the Devil gets a foothold in our lives is through unrepentant sin. I'm not talking about the occasional, predictable human screw-up. I'm talking about the person who habitually practices the same sinful, destructive behavior. Returns to the porn site, returns to the gambling site, returns to the bottle, returns to the bed of someone not your spouse, returns to fits of rage, returns to destructive eating habits. All of those are footholds! Every time you return, you imprint that behavior upon your soul and make the devil's stronghold more impregnable.

The only solution is to Repent. Metanoia. Do you remember what that word means in Greek? A U-turn! A 180. You are walking one direction, you stop, you turn around, and go the *other* way. That is repentance! You tell God you are sorry, you ask him for strength to stop doing what is wrong (what is opening the door of your life to the devil), and you go the other way!

Last week, one man who heard Ellis' message about how dabbling in the occult can provide a Satanic foothold, and he went home and retrieved some spiritual talismans he had from a non-Christian religion. He brought them back to church and asked one of our prayer team members to help him burn them up as an act of his repentance.

Repentance and forgiveness is a centerpiece of the Lord's Prayer. "*Forgive us our debts...*" And it is a two-way street. What's the rest of the phrase? "*...as we forgive our debtors.*" I'm going to say something that will be very hard for some of you to hear: Unforgiveness is one of the strongest footholds the devil can have in your life. If someone has harmed you, offended you, abused you and you have not been able to release that offense through forgiveness, then **Satan has a foothold** in your life. I'm not saying you should continue in an abusive relationship. I'm not saying your pain is not real. I'm not saying that your offender doesn't deserve justice-- justice is important. I'm saying that until you can truly forgive the most grievous offense against you, Satan still has you in his jaws!

So, **RESIST, REPENT** and **REBUKE**. I am repeating myself but it bears repeating. One of the most important weapons in spiritual warfare, one of the ways you resist the devil, is your **verbal** rebuke of Satan. Short, clear commands spoken in the name and authority of Jesus. And remember, they must be out loud. Why? Because the devil and demons can't read our minds. They aren't omniscient. We need to command them *out loud* to leave us alone.

We learn this from Jesus. His first encounter with the Devil in the wilderness finally ended when he spoke these words: Be gone, Satan! If Christians could just add those three words to their spiritual vocabulary! If, when we discern the devil at work in our lives or the lives of others, we could just pause and speak, out loud, "**In the name of Jesus, be gone Satan!**" ...what a difference that would make! Do you remember Satan's response? "*Then the devil left him.*" Just like James promised. "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you!*"

RESIST, REPENT, REBUKE, and RECEIVE. Again, I repeat myself but this is so important. When we rebuke the enemy and he leaves, we must immediately RECEIVE the re-filling of the Holy Spirit. In Matthew 12, Jesus warned that if the empty places left behind by the rebuke of an unclean spirit were not filled, that spirit could return and bring some of his nasty spiritual thugs along. This combination—the name of Jesus and the infilling of his Holy Spirit—is a potent recipe for Spiritual victory. We do not have any authority except the authority conferred to us in the name of Jesus. And we do not have any power except for the power of the Spirit of Jesus that indwells us. Remember the words? Exousia. Dunamis. Authority. Power. We need them both.

And let's not argue about a second baptism of the Holy Spirit. Paul tells us to be "continually filled by the Holy Spirit. Over and over again...every day, we should ask the Holy Spirit to fill us.

Why? Because we leak! We are like those helium balloons that sit around for five days. We leak! I am a prayer guardian for several boys in this church...and my regular prayer for each boy is, "Lord, fill him with your Holy Spirit!" Every time you engage in spiritual warfare...you should gird yourself with a prayer that the Holy Spirit will fill you, empower you, grant you gifts of discernment and faith and courage... and will fill the empty places left by the retreat of the enemy.

RESIST, REPENT, REBUKE, RECEIVE, and finally **RENEW.** In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he urges them to:

*"... put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be **renewed** in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."*

He said something similar in Romans 12:2:

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the **renewal** of your mind,"*

In both passages, the key to our becoming different persons—to living transformed lives with fewer footholds for the devil—is through the renewing of our minds! Our battle is won here! We have to overcome Stinkin' Thinkin'. "Stinkin' thinkin'" shows up when we pronounce curses over our own life. When we say, "I am stupid" or, "I'll never amount to anything" or, "I'm no good" or, "I'm a loser." Stinkin' thinkin' shows up when we go back to the same failed patterns of behavior, the same self-destructive thoughts that have kept us in a despair or anxiety or depression.

We must think in new ways, and the key to the renewing our minds is this: God's word. The Bible. The more of God's truth we put in our mind and heart, the more of the enemies lies we chase away. When Jesus battled the Devil in the wilderness, nearly everything he said except "be gone, Satan" was a direct quotation from Deuteronomy.

Remember, the only offensive weapon in the Armor of God is God's word. The way we replace stinkin' thinkin' with renewed minds is to immerse ourselves in the Word of God. Find out what God says about how to deal with our anxiety (my personal favorite); how to deal with our lust, our anger, our greed, our unforgiveness. If you are not immersing yourself in the Word daily, you are stealing from yourself the most potent weapon we possess in the lifelong process of renewing our minds.

This is the reason I memorize scripture. There are times when I don't even know what to pray or I'm too tired or stressed or anxious to pray my own words. When I have God's word in my mind, those become my prayers. In the last months, I have memorized chunks of Philipians and Romans and Psalms. It is why I often memorize my preaching text because having it in my mind makes it more real and accessible to me; it helps *me* in the renewing of my mind when I find the devil whispering the same old, stale, demonic lies of insecurity or inadequacy or incompetency in my ear.

If you would take one Bible passage, say Philippians 4:4-7 (*Rejoice in the Lord always, etc...write that down*) and memorize that and recite it to and from work this week, how much more renewed do you think your mind would be than if you listened to talk radio? Ultimately, our spiritual battle is won right here...on the six inch battlefield between our ears. If you replace your abusive, self-cursing talk, "I'm stupid...I'm unworthy... I'm incompetent..." with the promises from God's word about who you are in Christ, how loved and gifted and valuable you are to God, you have no idea the difference makes in protecting you from the destructive, consuming lies of the enemy.

Just this last week, Cyndi and I were ministering to a couple. They are experiencing a terrible attack from the devil. Although they are doing the right things—praying, claiming God's word, drawing close to each other—we could tell that they were worn down by these attacks of the evil one. We prayed for them. But we did more than that. We resisted the devil on their behalf! We took the authority we have in Christ and, in the name of Jesus, ordered spirits of fear, confusion, and depression to leave them. We invited the Holy Spirit to fill them and restore them. And I believe they left that time of ministry with renewed hope, courage, and confidence in the Lord's faithfulness.

Resist. Repent. Rebuke. Receive. Renew.

This is a battle plan that will lead you to victory over the enemy of your soul. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world! As we begin our celebration of Holy Week—of the week that changed eternity—let us do so with a renewed sense of the power and authority we possess because we belong to the one who has won the victory! Christus Victor! To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen!