

Know Your Enemy: The Devil, John 8:44-45, 5/1/22

Last week- Life is a struggle. And while there is beauty, and love, and laughter and coffee and red wine and Lobster tail...all good and gracious gifts from our creator, this world is a broken, fallen place that has pain, suffering, anxiety, war, strife, dysfunction and death. The struggle is real. We should expect this because Jesus himself said, in this life you will have troubles. But the struggle is not what we often think it is. As we saw last week in Ephesians 6- the struggle is not flesh and blood. It's not presidents or people, tanks or twitter or your spouse or your 2-year-old. It's the powers and authorities and the evil forces in the spiritual realm.

And so we want to learn how to fight the good fight of faith like Paul. If we are going to stand firm and become resilient disciples of Jesus. If we are going to pursue the abundant life that Jesus promises and a life filled with the fruit of the Spirit, we must first know our Enemy. Christians for centuries have used the biblical paradigm of a three-headed enemy: **The Devil, The Flesh, The World**. If you missed the first message go back and watch that. A great resource through this series is the book **Live No Lies by John Mark Comer**. And our thesis for this series is that the primary battle lines between spiritual world and humanity is in the realm of our minds, between truth and lies. **The three-headed enemy's strategy is this: Deceptive Ideas sown by the Devil that target our disordered desires of the Flesh, which are accepted and celebrated in our broken World.**

Today we want to talk about The Devil. Again we go back to Jesus in John 8. Let me remind you that Jesus is in a debate with the Jewish leaders over the identity and origin of Jesus, whom they reject as the Son of God and Messiah. In response: **v. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.**

When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

From this text we learn at least **4 things about the Devil.**

#1 The Devil is Real. He's not a myth from a pre-scientific age. He's not a character from a cartoon or movie in a red suit, horns and a pitchfork. In our American culture, the path to erasing the truth is first through trivializing it. We make it into a joke, a meme, a punchline that becomes easier to dismiss altogether. And nothing would please the Devil more. Famous line by Keyzer Soze: "The greatest trick the Devil ever pulled with to convince the world that he doesn't exist." But Jesus didn't agree with our modern sensibilities. For Jesus the Devil was a real, powerful evil creature. Now you may be here and say, you know Jesus has some great things to say about "love your neighbor as yourself" and "turn the other cheek" and "I have come to give life and peace." But this whole devil stuff? This is wonky. I invite you to suspend your judgment on this. What if Jesus knows more than your modern sensibilities? Open your mind to this possibility.

I want to take just 5 minutes up top to do some "Devilology". The title Jesus uses here- The Devil means **"slanderer."** But Jesus and the other authors of Scripture give him other titles as

well. The Satan (The adversary), the evil one, the deceiver, the ancient serpent, the god of this age, the ruler of this world, the prince of demons. Interestingly, Jesus never calls him by a name but a title. Actually, many scholars would argue he has no name in the Bible. But you say, "Wait! I thought his name was Lucifer?" Maybe. This name is only hinted at once in the entire Bible. And that word isn't actually in the Bible, it's a Latin translation from the Hebrew word "Heylel" a word that means "morning star or light bearer." Isaiah 14:12- *How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!* Which interestingly is also a word Jesus uses to describe himself in Revelation 22:16. My theory is that The Devil doesn't have an actual name, whatever his name may have been, God removed it as a sign of judgment.

What is the Devil's Origin Story? Let me preface by saying we don't know for sure, while he's a powerful creature, he's not the focus of the Bible. He shows up in the Garden in Genesis 3, although not directly by name, but his origins precedes this moment. We have a few passages of Scripture that give us some clues- Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, Revelation 12. A high-ranking, beautiful and powerful angel, originally part of God's good and glorifying creation. 1 Timothy 3:6 says the original sin of the Devil was pride, possibly believing he was equal to God, or more specifically that he should have the position of Jesus. Revelation 12 says he led a rebellion in heaven, a third of the angels rebel with him. He and the fallen angels were banished from Heaven and fell to Earth.

The Devil is extremely powerful and highly intelligent. However, because he is a created being, he is limited. He is not omniscient or omnipresent. He cannot read your mind, which is why what we say and do are very important. When we say "The Devil made me do it." He can't make you do anything. We have to grant evil access. And because he is only one being, it's more likely the Devil himself is not tempting us, but one of his loyal demons. The Devil's days are numbered. Defeated on the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. The weapon The Devil thought would be victory becomes his defeat. He is a defeated foe, but still a powerful foe. While he is still alive and well and powerful we know his end. Matthew 25:41 in that great and terrifying teaching on the final judgment Jesus says, *Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* Side bar, when people say I'd rather rule with the Devil than serve God in heaven. They are sadly mistaken, the Devil has no power in Hell, nor will they. Satan is not the "ruler" in hell but eternally destroyed in Hell. It is only by the free gift of eternal life by repenting of our sins and believing in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross that save us from sharing that destination.

#2 The Devil's end goal is murder. v.44 *He was a murderer from the beginning.* John 10:10 He comes to steal, kill and destroy. He is at war with God's vision for the good life. Where there is peace he wants to bring hostility. Unity he wants to fragment it into a thousand micro-tribes. Where there is love he wants to corrupt it into selfishness and lust. Where there is human flourishing and freedom- he wants to push it toward tyranny or anarchy. Although he must know he's ultimately defeated he still wants to burn it all down to the ground and drag as many to hell or at least hell on earth. C.S. Lewis- "There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every

square inch, every split second is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan.” To be a Christian is to join in on a war against him.

#3 The Devil’s Means of Murder are Lies. *v.44 When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* When we think about spiritual warfare, we think about Christian paranoia or strange exorcisms, tarot cards and seances. There is truth in those things...but notice here, it’s none of those things. It’s a power-encounter in the form of a debate with the religious leaders of the day over truth and lies. Deception is the Devil’s primary weapon of choice. Why? Why are they more destructive than plagues, demonic possessions... Winston Churchill once said, “The empires of the future are empires of the mind.” Because the ideas we believe in our minds and then let into our bodies give shape to the trajectory of our souls, on an individual level and large scale society. They shape how we live and who we become. *“We live at the mercy of our ideas.” -Dallas Willard.* When we believe and live out truth we flourish and thrive in a way that God intended- that corresponds to the reality of who God is. But when we believe lies, ideas that are not congruent with the reality, and open our bodies, our habits, our mental maps as it were to those lies, we allow an ideological cancer, a poison to infect our souls. God’s reality leads to life, unreality leads to death.

#4 The Devil is an Expert Liar

Let’s go all the way back to the beginning in the garden in Genesis 3. *3:1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.* The first description of the Devil in Genesis 3 was the word “crafty” - “cunning and deceitful.” Many scholars believe the description is conveying that this serpent was distinct from God’s good creation, an intruder to the garden and this serpent’s true identity was the Devil, disguised as a serpent.

v.2 He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” His first words were a lie. And it was a subtle one in the form of a question, “Did God really say, Just an open-minded question.

² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said,

‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,

she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Notice the Devil battles Eve not with a weapon, knives and bombs but with simple yet effective idea. An idea that had some truth to it, just enough truth to make it plausible. And that's why the best lies are not overt, they are mostly true but the 2 or 5 or 20% of the lie is the most important part. Or they are true, but not the whole truth. Now here's what is particularly cunning about the kind of lie he told. Follow me on this.

Three Questions of Life:

Who is God? (Theology & worship)

Who are we? (Anthropology & identity)

What is the good life? (Morality & Fulfillment)

The devil comes at Eve with a counter-idea to all three. **Who is God?** "Maybe God isn't as good, generous or wise as he claims to be. He's holding out on you, he's stingy and selfish. He's lying to you. **Who are we?** God made us as human beings that are not God, below the heavenly beings, above the other creatures, with great potential and limitations. What does the Devil say? "You will be like God. You can ascend and transcend. If you seize autonomy from God and do your own thing with me, you'll be better off. Don't let God limit you. Be true to yourself!" **What is the good life?** Notice he awakened her desires for pleasure, for wisdom and to be her own authority. "Look at this bright, shiny thing, it will truly satisfy you more than all the things God has given you. Then you will be happy." To put it simply, we sin because we believe a lie will make us happy.

These are still his go to lies! The note and nuance of them is culturally curated, but they are the same lies. Our modern culture: Who is God? Well there is no god. A myth, a pre-modern idea to control. Or if there is a god, he doesn't care about you or love you, how could he? And he can't be trusted. Which is a disaster, because the next two questions are based on an answer to the first one. Our Morality is based on our anthropology which is based on our theology. This is why the **Devil's primary target is our trust in God and his truth.** If he can get us to doubt God and instead trust in our own feelings and sensibilities, he has us. If you doubt that God isn't in control and doesn't have your best interests in mind, you are going to be highly susceptible to anxiety, attempts to control your life and the people around you. To seek security in money, job, relationships, morality, and the good life...ultimately things that will slip away from you. If you believe God doesn't love you, you are going to be highly susceptible to insecurity and unable to love yourself. And to fill that whole you may chase love through Instagram, unhealthy relationships, and if those things don't work, it may turn self-inflicting- numb yourself or worse. Still works like a charm.

Does that idea lead to life or does it lead to death?

Jesus came to bring truth and he said that truth will set you free. Not free to do or be whatever you want. Free from the enslavement of deceptive ideas that enslave us to a life that leads to death. He came to give us abundant life.

Leave you with a thought. Where Eve failed, where Adam failed, where every one of us have failed... Jesus succeeded. When Jesus battled the deceptive ideas of the Devil in the wilderness

for 40 days, how did he resist? He trusted God and his definition of reality. "It is written." **When we are being tempted with a deceptive idea we need to say, "It is written."**