

CHRISTIANS UNDER ATTACK
I PETER 5:8-14

NEED: TO OVERCOME IN THE BATTLE WITH SATAN.

PROPOSITION: WHILE CHRISTIANS ARE UNDER SATANIC ATTACK, VICTORY IS POSSIBLE.

OBJECTIVE: TO EQUIP GOD'S PEOPLE TO OVERCOME SATANIC OPPOSITION.

INTRODUCTION:

Someone has it "in" for Christians. This becomes obvious as you survey the scene across the world. A new book came across my desk a few days ago entitled, The Lion's Den. This book is a survey of the sufferings that Christians are knowing around the world. In country after country Christians are being put to death. There have been more Christian martyr in this century than any century in the history of the Christian faith. Instead of there being fewer martyrs as the days go by, there seemed to be an increasing number martyred. Peter wrote this letter to early Christians who were living under such threat day after day. He wanted the Christians of that day to understand the nature of the attack against them.

The attack does not necessarily always take the form of persecution or martyrdom. The attack may come in a more intimate and personal way. The attack comes when the people find themselves almost overcome with an unwholesome fear. They find that their commitment to God is being questioned from some unknown source continually in their mind. They find themselves tempted to slack off in their commitment to Jesus Christ. Where is this attack

coming from? What is the significance of these attacks? What will the outcome be? We are given answers to these questions in this trustworthy word from the Apostle Peter in our text.

I THE ATTACK IS SATANIC.

Listen to this clear word from the inspired Apostle, “Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” This confronts us with the source of the attack upon the believer. The attack is from Satan himself.

1. His personality.

There are still some who question the reality of Satan, but not those who have taken a careful look at the evil that is in our world. There is enough evil in the world that it requires some kind of evil, malignant mind that is behind it. The Bible reveals to us that this evil mind behind the wickedness in our world is Satan himself.

The Apostle helps us understand the nature of our enemy by the words that he uses in this text. The word “enemy” is actually a legal word. It was used of a legal adversary in court. He would be your opponent in a lawsuit. This gives us some insight into the very nature of our enemy and the nature of his attack upon us. He comes against us making accusation against us like a prosecuting attorney.

The word “devil” used in our text has the root idea of a slanderer. He is one who is always bringing false accusations. He accuses God to man and man to God. He says to man, “God is

not good. You cannot trust him.” He says to God about man, “He does not really love you. He is a hypocrite. It is his personality to slander and to bring accusation.

The imagery of the lion used in our text is a reminder of another aspect of his personality. The lion is the king of the jungle. He rules the jungle by intimidation. Satan is seeking to be the king and lord of all the earth. He resents and resists God’s rightful place in the world that he has made and persists in his purpose to overthrow the rule of God. He is a pretender and imposter as he seeks to rule God’s universe.

2. His plan.

This word concerning the activity of Satan is helpful to us. “Your enemy, the devil, prowls around like roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” The method of the lion in being the king of the jungle is intimidation. He intimidates by his roar. By sounding ferocious. He seeks to paralyze his prey with fear. He can cause his prey to be frightened, he has a distinct advantage in his attempt to overcome them. This is what Satan does. He comes against us in some manner that will produce fear in us. Not a wholesome fear, a reverence for God but rather a cringing, paralyzing fear. While we are in that state of uncertainty and fear we are vulnerable to his attack. Any time you feel an unnatural fear filling your mind and your heart, there is the distinct possibility that you are encountering his majesty, the evil one.

3. His persistence.

The verbs used by Peter in our text would indicate that the adversary is persistent in his attack upon us. “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to

devour. The verbs are present tense verbs, which means that the action is continuous. He is always prowling about. He is always roaring. He is always seeking.

Now, we should not misread that. Actually, we are not always under attack. But we are always subject to attack. Neither Satan nor the demons are continually attacking you but they are persistently attacking you. They will look for an opportune moment to come against you in their spiritual attack and they usually come in the moment you least expect them.

So, we need to understand that the attack against the Christian is a satanic attack. We do have an adversary and he is standing against us.

II THE ATTACK IS RESISTABLE.

Actually Peter wrote these words to encourage us. It is important that we understand what is happening in our Christian lives and not be in the dark about spiritual reality. He wants to encourage us because he is confident that the child of God can successfully overcome any attack that the enemy brings against them.

1. Our preparation.

One element in being successful when you are under attack is readiness. “Be self-controlled and alert.” The admonition to be self-controlled is translated by some “be sober.” It is actually a reference to mental self-control. The idea in the word is to be so in control that you are calm and collected.

The second word that speaks to preparation, “and alert,” means to be awake and watchful. There is doubtlessly an autobiographical background to this statement. Simon Peter had in mind the warning that Jesus gave him concerning a satanic attack. He said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail and when you have turned back strengthen your brothers.” Jesus did not want the attack of the enemy to catch Simon by surprise so he gave him this warning. However, you wonder how effective the warning was. In spite of the warning of Jesus, Simon stumbled along in his pride and self-sufficiency until he fell into the trap of the devil in the courtyard of the high priest. There in the courtyard he denied his Lord three times. It was the most shameful moment of his life. How many times he must have regretted that he did not listen when Jesus warned him and was not “alert” when the temptation came. In spite of the word of warning, the temptation seemed to have caught him by surprise. It is important that you never be surprised by an attack from the enemy. You are living in Lion’s country so walk and live day by day with an awareness that you are subject to attack at any moment.

2. Our stand.

When the enemy does attack our responsibility is to stand. “Resist him, standing firm in the faith.” A missionary who served in Africa gives this word of counsel about a lion. He says that if a lion begins to attack you, you should never flee. Anyone who runs from the lion will be his prey. He is quicker and faster than you. His counsel was that when the lion comes stalking toward you the best thing to do is to take a stand and look him straight in the eye without flinching. If he does leap through the air toward you, have your spear so placed that he will fall

upon it. There is every likelihood that if you take your stand and courageously look the lion in the eye, that he will flee.

The application is rather obvious. As the child of God we are to flee the very “appearance of evil” and “flee temptation,” but we are to “resist the devil.” We are not to flee from the devil in fear, we are to face the enemy with our confidence in the Lord.

The expression “firm in the faith” has been understood in two ways. Some understand it to be a reference of standing firm “in the faith.” Or that we are to stand with our confidence in the revealed truth of God. Others understand it to be a call to stand with subjective faith and unshakable confidence in the Lord and His resources. I have never felt comfortable making a choice between these two but rather embracing both of them. To stand with personal faith is not really different from standing with confidence in the revealed truth that we find in the word of God. If you have turned your back upon the revealed truth of God, you will not have the personal faith you need to stand against the enemy. But we are to “stand!” We are to “resist!” We are not to give in to fear or intimidation but to stand our ground in the Lord. Some of you will remember the personal testimony given by the author of [The Pursuit of Holiness](#).

He indicated that during a time of deep inner struggle in his own life he found himself under unusual spiritual attack he says, “During this time I was leading a weekly Bible study at a military base about one hour drive from where I lived. Every Monday night as I left the fellowship of the Bible study and started my lonely drive home, Satan would begin to attack me: “How can anyone who is having the struggles you are having be a Christian?” he would ask. I

began to fight him by resorting to an old gospel hymn which begins, “Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me, and that thou bidst me to come to the thee, oh lamb of God I come.” I would sing through that hymn. By the time I would finish I would be praising God for His salvation given freely to me through Jesus Christ.” That seems to be what it means to stand in the faith. Instead of giving in to the accusations and intimidations of the devil, you stand against him. You decide in your heart that no power or force that may come against you will turn you from your trust in and reliance upon Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. You determine in your heart that by the grace of God you will serve the Lord Jesus as long as you live.

3. Our partners.

We are not in this struggle alone. “Because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. This reminds us that there are many, many other believers all around the world who experience the same kind of attack from the devil. One of the tactics of the devil is to make us feel like that we are standing alone, that no one else has ever felt like we felt, that no one else has ever had the question that we have, that no one else has ever had questions about God or about their own worthiness. We will resist best when we are aware that we are not resisting along. We stand within a fellowship of resisters who have determined to overcome.

III. THE ATTACK WILL BE USEFUL

Peter gives us the unique Biblical perspective on the satanic attack. While the enemy comes

against us as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and seeking to fill us with fear, and thus immobilize us, he is actually working within severe limitations. The truth revealed in scripture though he is our enemy he does nothing without permission from the sovereign God of this universe. Though he acts out of enmity toward God, in the end he actually accomplishes the purpose of God. Martin Luther was so bold that he called the devil, “God’s devil.” Even though he does not intend for it to be so, the devil actually in the end helps God accomplish his purposes. We are told two significant details in this passage.

1. God limits the time of the attack.

Peter writes, “And the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while will Himself restore you.” The attack will last only “a little while.” In the end God will call to conclusion all of the attacks of the enemy against the people of God. God is still in control even though the devil is giving his mighty roars.

This is a wonderful word of encouragement to those of you who find yourself under severe attack today. God has already determined that it will last only “a little while.” Now, it must be granted that sometimes God’s “little while” seems to be a long time from a human perspective. But God knows about the attack and has already set time limits on the attack.

2. God determines the outcome of the attack.

This is a most encouraging statement. The God who watches over our lives is indeed “the God of all grace.” He is also the one who has called us “to His eternal glory in Christ.” Since He is who He is and has done what He has done, He has already determined that the attacks of the

devil will work for our good. Indeed God Himself “will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.”

When you take the four verbs used by Peter concerning the outcome of these sufferings brought on by satanic attack, you have to be encouraged. In the end you will be restored, strong, firm, and steadfast. Instead of being destroyed by the attack, you will actually be built up by the attack. Instead of these sufferings destroying your Christian life they will actually result in growth and maturity in your Christian life.

The brief doxology of the Apostle gives us the reason this is so – “to Him be the power forever and ever.” The God of all grace who has called us unto himself is the one who has the ultimate power and sovereignty. He will determine the outcome of all things – not this enemy who roars against us.

Surely the thrust of this whole passage is that you and I need to face every situation in life with unshakable confidence in our God. While there is an enemy against us, he works within the limits established by the sovereign God of grace who has called us to be His people. He holds our destiny in His hands – not the enemy.

So, dear soldier of the cross, on to victory! On to victory!

One of the legends around Southwestern Seminary in Fort Worth concerns the life of Professor Dr. Jeff D. Ray. In the early years of the Seminary he taught preaching and gave himself to the

building up of young ministers. However, his life was not without suffering and difficulty. He knew what it was to be under attack from the enemy. During one of the deep times of difficulty in his life, he received the news that one of his sons had died in a tragic death. It was a crime that was never solved. Dr. Ray felt that it was more than he could stand. He was so dejected and so in despair that he said to himself, "I cannot go on!"

Mrs. L. R. Elliott, wife of the librarian of Southwestern Seminary at that time, sent to Dr. Ray a scrapbook filled with poems and articles that had encouraged her. Dr. Ray turned listlessly through the pages of the scrapbook without really having much interest. Suddenly His eyes fell on a title that caught his attention. He read, "I Won't Let Go!" "Why," he said to himself, "That's just what I had been wanting to do. I'll see what the author has to say." Here's what he read:

"I WON'T LET GO!"

I want to let go, but I won't let go.

There are battles to fight,

But day in and by night

For God and the right –

And I'll never let go.

I want to let go, but I won't let go.

I am sick, tis true,

Worried and blue,

And worried through and through,

But I won't let go.

I want to let go, but I won't let go.

I'll never yield!

What! Lie down on the field

And surrender my shield?

No, I'll never let go!

I want to let go, but I won't let go.

May this be my song!

“Mid legions of wrong –

Oh, God, keep me strong

That I may never let go!”

Dr. Ray closed the scrapbook, got up from his couch of grief and despondency, turned his back forever and successfully on the thought of giving up and quitting. He returned to the classroom and to the pulpits of the churches to preach. For many years he had the poem printed and reprinted to share with each of his classes.

This is our commitment this morning. “I won't let go!”