**St Martins C3 – March 19, 2023**

**The Victor – Victory over Satan**

**Sermon Summary:**

Evil is present in our world and the source of that evil is a very real powerful spiritual being called Satan, who is doing all he can to disrupt God’s purposes and control our world. Evil acts happen every day in our world because individuals or groups of people cooperate (mostly without realising) with Satan and his schemes.

In Genesis the first book of the Bible we read of God creating a perfect world and placing two innocent people in that perfect world. However, Satan (in the form of a serpent) came and deceives Adam and Eve. They chose to cooperate with Satan rather than trusting in God. This allowed Satan to have a measure of control, and he used this to corrupt God’s good creation and bring evil to our world. Now there is an ongoing conflict between God and Satan over control of our world. We are in the middle of that conflict; with a choice of whose side we are on?

I appreciate that what the Bible has revealed on this subject is in stark contrast to what our secular western world believes. Most people are more likely to believe that Satan is a mythical figure and, if evil exists, it is the result of people’s bad choices. The problem with this view is that it ignores some aspects regarding the nature of evil:

1. Why are some evil acts so sadistic?
2. Why haven’t we managed to train everyone to be good?
3. When we are tempted there seems to be an influence outside of ourselves, leading us into sin and evil.

The secular view of evil raises more questions than answers.

A Biblical worldview of the origins of evil is far more logical and lines up with our human experience. We can also be confident that it is true because it is what God revealed. Having an accurate worldview of Satan and evil matters, as it helps us appreciate the victory achieved for us over Satan. Christ’s victory over Satan is an important aspect of Christ’s life, death, resurrection, and glorification.

**Read: Matthew 4:1-11**

1. **Jesus was prepared to resist Satan.**

Jesus had a strong relationship with God, He knew the scriptures and could quickly access them. Therefore, He knew that what Satan was saying, needed to be challenged.

1. **Jesus responds quickly and decisively.**

Jesus doesn’t get into a debate with Satan. He simply takes a stand with God and His Word and rejects Satan’s temptations. What Jesus is modelling to us here is that there is no need for us to spend time considering the merits of the temptation. We need to simply stand against them in God’s strength. (1 Cor 10:13)

1. **Jesus defeats Satan privately before he defeats Him publicly.**

In the weeks and months to come Jesus will go on to call out the Pharisees on their sin and cast demons out of people. Jesus will defeat Satan publicly, but first He had to win the private battle. Let us learn from Jesus’ example and practice winning in private, so that we are ready to reinforce His victory in the world around us.

Like Jesus, as we partner with God and rely on Him, we will defeat Satan in our lives. The place to start, is learning to recognise and resist Satan’s temptations. As we do that, let us stay close to Christ and not give any room to Satan. It will be challenging at times, but remember, we are on the side of the victor. So, let us apply His victory to the fight in our own lives, as well as when we are ministering to those around us.

***Suggested Connect Group discussion questions:***

*How might people who don’t hold a Biblical worldview explain the presence of evil in the world?*

*What could be some gaps in their reasoning?*

*Why is it significant that Jesus beat Satan before His death and resurrection?*

*What prepared Jesus to defeat Satan?*

*What else is helpful for us in what Jesus modelled to us here in his resisting of Satan?*

*In the discussion today, what have you found most helpful in regard to resisting temptation?*

*What might God be leading you to pray into, or speak into this year, that might take some ground off the enemy?*

**Monday’s Devotion – Be prepared**

**Ephesians 6:13-14**

*Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.*

We need the resources of God’s armour in our lives because we are in a very real spiritual battle. The first two aspects Paul highlights is truth and righteousness.

Truth and righteousness are what we inwardly believe and think about regarding who we are and how we are to behave. If our thinking and beliefs have not been shaped by God and His Word, then we will be vulnerable to the enemy’s attacks.

In my personal and pastoral experience there seems to be areas in our thinking that we are strong on where we can resist the devil easily and other areas where we are weaker. Guess where our enemy is going to attack? So, let us be aware of where our weak thinking is and explore what lie we are tempted to believe, in this area of our lives. Awareness is half the battle.

Once we have developed that awareness, let us bring it before God in prayer. Surrender it to Him. Ask God to reveal His truth, so that you can take a stand on His side and in His righteousness.

**Tuesday’s Devotion – Remember your calling**

**Ephesians 6:15**

*And with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace.*

We might be wondering why Paul brings out the aspect of taking the gospel out into the world as the next piece of our armour? However, I can see why highlighting this here makes a lot of sense. God has called ALL of us to extend His Kingdom in the world. This is our life’s purpose. This is our calling. Beyond our inner thinking about what is true and right, our life’s purpose ought to be next in our big picture thinking.

Paul’s point here, is that we CANNOT let our enemy’s attacks derail us from God’s calling on our lives. Actually it is God’s call on our lives that keeps us on track. We need to see that God’s purpose on our lives is so important that we never do anything to compromise it.

If you have been a Christian for a few years you will know of other Christians whom God had called to do much in His Kingdom, but they didn’t fulfil that call, because they fell for Satan’s schemes. Jesus resisted Satan, partly because He knew what was true and what wasn’t, but also because He had His eyes on the call God had placed on His life.

Take some time today and consider again what God has called you to do? Who He has called you to influence? Ponder on how important that is and how important it is that NOTHING corrupts that call.

**Wednesday’s Devotion – Have faith**

**Ephesians 6:16**

*In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.*

Here Paul is reminding us that it is not in our strength that fight our battles with Satan, it is in His strength. Faith is about our confidence in what God will do, rather than what we can do. A soldier must put a lot of confidence in his shield to protect him. He will be hoping that the craftsman made it well. The issue though is not just how well it has been made, but whether it is used.

Many times, we don’t use our shield of faith. What I mean by that is that we put our confidence in our ability rather than God’s ability. We try and overcome spiritual realities naturally rather than spiritually. We need to remember that Satan is stronger than us if we are not constantly trusting in God. We are to put our trust in Christ’s ability, not our ability.

What that means on a practical level is that we constantly bring everything in our lives to God in prayer. When we are unsure, we pray. When we don’t know what to do, we pray. When we are bombarded with pressure, we pray. Prayer reveals our dependence on God. That is why Paul says *pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying*. (6:18)

**Thursday’s Devotion – Know who you are**

**Ephesians 6:17**

*Take the helmet of salvation.*

When Paul is talking here about protecting ourselves with a helmet of salvation, he is not talking about a prayer that we prayed however long ago where we gave our lives to Christ. That prayer was important, but he is talking about much more than that.

Paul had a very clear understanding of us being children of God. (Romans 8) The security of this relationship is significant in our fight against Satan. If Satan is choosing to mess with us, he is choosing to mess with our family, because we belong to God. Our identity is secure and significant in the spiritual realm. God knows this, Satan knows this, but do we know it?

Let’s consider an example of this. In Acts 27, Paul is a prisoner on a boat sailing for Rome, where he is to stand trial before Caesar. After a storm had damaged the ship and they were adrift at sea, Paul assures them that they will make it. How can Paul be so confident? Because the God whom Paul belonged to and whom Paul served told him he would make it to Rome. Notice here that Paul’s confidence is securely connected to His identity in Christ. It is also in what God said (which we will look at tomorrow), but for now, let us remember WHOSE we are, so that we can fight against any temptation that comes against us.

**Friday’s Devotion – Speak God’s Word**

**Ephesians 6:17**

*And the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

On Sunday we explored the passage that recorded the temptation of Jesus. Notice that in Jesus’ temptation, Satan used the scriptures as well. So, there is more going on here than just quoting scripture. Anyone can do that. Quoting alone, won’t push back the enemy.

God’s Holy Spirit was the One who inspired scripture to be written and is still the One who helps us understand and apply it. Therefore, we ought to be Spirit-led in our reading and applying of scripture. This is what makes the difference between us and Satan. Satan knows the power of God’s word, but is not Spirit-led in using it. We however, can be the ones who listen to how the Holy Spirit is leading us to understand and apply the scriptures in our spiritual battles.

One practical application of this is for us to speak out God’s truth in a Spirit-led way. There is something quite powerful in declaring out loud God’s Word over a circumstance or situation. (Obviously, this is done in our private prayer time, or with other Christians who understand). I don’t know all the reasons for this, but I suspect our ears and brain needs to hear it come from our own mouth, for it to be internalised.

Let us stand strong in the full armour of God against our enemy. Let us stand strong in His truth, in who we are, in our calling and let us use God’s word to push back against the enemy’s schemes.