

Trinity 21, 2021

John 4:46-54/Ephesians 6:10-17

Dear heavenly Father, in this world the devil looks for that opportune time to assault us in order that he might lead us into misbelief and despair. We pray that you would prepare us for that evil day of assault; that you would prepare us by putting on us the full armor you have prepared for us and putting in our hand of faith the Sword of the Spirit, so that when that evil day does come, you may keep us standing in Jesus, who was perfectly outfitted in the armor of God for us; and standing in him retain the victory. Now we ask that you would bless the words of my lips and the meditation of our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Part I

We are not used to an armed force's presence in our streets. So when we see it, it takes us by surprise.

It is like when my family and I moved to Santiago, Chile, in 1994. We left our home in the midwest, boarded a plane in Minneapolis and took off for Chile. When we and the other travelers deboarded, we were taken aback. Men of the Chilean armed forces stood watch. They did, with machine guns and wearing protective gear. We soon came to learn that the armed

forces had a regular presence in the public square. They could be seen anywhere in the city and country.

That is not a sight we are used to in our country. We are not, but other places and times are. At the time of the writing of Ephesians, there was an armed force presence in the public square. Roman soldiers stood watch over the Roman empire. So the people were familiar with the Roman soldiers' swords and protective gear. Paul draws on that in his letter to the Ephesians.

Paul's point of drawing on protective armor is that the Christian life is under attack. Behind those attacks is the devil. We are not able to stand on our own. So we need to be "strong IN THE Lord." That is why Paul draws on the Roman soldiers protective armor and sword; why he writes:

Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil."

The catechism includes among those wiley schemes of the devil the following: deception, misbelief and despair. So the devil looks for an open door to put his wiley scheme into operation. When that door opens, like an enemy combatant he assaults; he assaults with everything he has. It is the "day of evil," of

which Paul writes. Such a day came to the nobleman in our John reading.

## Part II

First a little background. Jesus had come to the region of Galilee. When he arrived, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen some of the signs Jesus had done. They were impressed. They were impressed not with who he was, BUT with the signs.

While in Galilee, Jesus also visited the village of Cana. Cana was the place where Jesus did his first sign. It was there that he had changed water into wine at a wedding. The sign gave witness to who he is.

It was sometime after Jesus arrived in Cana, that a nobleman from the city, Capernaum, sought Jesus. He had heard Jesus was there and so he sought help for his sick son. Actually, he was at the point of death. The nobleman begged Jesus: Come and heal my son.

The nobleman did the right thing. He went to Jesus. Though he did, the devil saw an open door. The open door was to deceive the nobleman and lead him into misbelief ... and Jesus speaks

to that misbelief. “UNLESS YOU SEE signs and wonders, you will not believe.”

The misbelief of which Jesus speaks looks for signs in one’s personal life to prove faith. Misbelief looks

- for healing to my body;
- for realizing my dreams;
- for experiencing visions of God.

Misbelief thinks for faith to be real, such signs **MUST** be there.

... but what happens when they are not there? It is like the Christian woman I knew who had a chronic illness. Her children told her that if she had a strong enough faith, she would be healed. She prayed for healing. She did not get it.

The woman was **CRUSHED**. She questioned her faith. The devil had brought her to the brink of despair. It is how the devil assaults. He takes aim with arrows of deception, misbelief and despair. Then sends them, drives them; and, they **PENETRATE** the soul.

### Part III

Back in our John reading, though Jesus identified the nobleman’s misbelief, he still wants Jesus to come. He urged Jesus: Come before it is too late! It is then that the nobleman

tells Jesus that his son is at the point of death. He, in essence, adds: It is urgent you come!

... but Jesus did not move. He did not offer to go down to the nobleman's son; did not offer to do a sign of wonder before the nobleman's eyes. Instead, he just gave the nobleman his word:

Go your way. Your son lives!

Jesus was moving the nobleman FROM seeking signs TO his word; and, the nobleman took Jesus at his word.

- He did BEFORE he saw a sign.
- He did DESPITE what he saw.
- He laid hold of the word "in the evil day."

That is what Paul means when he writes:

Take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand in the evil day.

About that armor he adds:

ABOVE ALL take up the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Paul means to say that

- BEFORE the devil sends his flaming darts -
- BEFORE he sends his arrows of deception and misbelief -
- BEFORE the devil drives the arrow of despair -

take up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Lay hold of it by faith. Read it. Think on it. Keep it before you. Make it a part of your life.

Then, when the day of evil does come, you have God's protection; you have Jesus. When you have Jesus, you have the one who was PERFECTLY outfitted for this assault of the devil. The prophet Isaiah looked into the future and saw Jesus perfectly outfitted. He put it this way:

[The Lord] saw that there was no one to intervene.

So his own arm worked salvation.

His own righteousness supported him.

He clothed himself with righteousness like armor.

He wore a helmet of salvation on his head.

He dressed in garments for revenge.

Perfectly outfitted for the devil's onslaught, Jesus battled the devil for us. He did and the devil emptied his quiver of arrows. With his quiver all emptied, the devil thought he won.

- He thought so, WHEN Jesus bowed his head and died.
- He thought so, BUT Easter morning Jesus came back from that battle, the Victor.

The Easter hymn puts it this way:

Satan's arrows broken lie,  
Destroyed hell's direst weapon.

O hear!

What cheer!

Christ victorious

Riseth glorious

Life he giveth

He was dead,

But see, He liveth!

To be sure, the devil's arrows are broken; sin, death and the devil are defeated. They are by Jesus' death and resurrection; and, the Word of God gives you Jesus' victory.

That was the case of the woman chronically ill that I mentioned before. The Word of God worked in her life. The Word took her eyes OFF OF looking for a sign in her personal life; and not seeing that sign FROM FALLING into despair.

Instead, the word PUT HER FAITH in Jesus who triumphed over the devil; who defeated our greatest enemies - sin, death and

the devil. So, she learned to live NOT by what she saw, BUT by faith. By faith she knew that whatever her life held in the future, she was safe in Jesus' hands.

That is what the Word of God does for you and me. It takes your eyes off all the things you see in life; all the things the devil uses to drive the arrows of misbelief and despair into your soul. The Word takes your eyes OFF them and PUTS your faith in Jesus.

That is why Jesus teaches us to pray in the Sixth Petition: Lead us not into temptation. The catechism explains:

We pray that our Father in heaven would guard and keep us so that the devil would not deceive us nor lead us into misbelief or despair, and though we THUS BE TEMPTED, we may IN THE END overcome and retain the victory.

By putting the Word of God in your hand of faith, you DO have the victory over the devil; you have Jesus.

#### Part IV

At the end of our John reading, the good news that the nobleman's son had been healed could not wait. Before the nobleman got home, his servants came to meet him. They came with the report: Your son lives!



The relieved father inquired as to what time the son began to get better. The servants' answered: Yesterday at the seventh hour. That was the same hour Jesus told the nobleman: Your son lives!

The servants' report CONFIRMED Jesus' word. No longer was the father a "sign-seeker." The nobleman believed. He told his whole household. They, too, believed.

Then we are told: This is the SECOND sign Jesus did when he had come into Galilee. The first time Jesus changed water to wine. The second time Jesus healed the nobleman's son. This second sign, though, was not the last sign. The GREATEST sign was yet to come.

It would come on Easter Sunday and the following Sunday. Two Sundays in a row Jesus showed himself TRIUMPHANT over sin, death and the devil. He showed himself alive; and, the disciples saw Jesus risen from the dead. They saw him with their own eyes. They saw the nail marks in his hands. Their witness is recorded for us in the pages of the Bible.

Then John connects the dots for us:

Many OTHER SIGNS Jesus did, but these are WRITTEN that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ and BELIEVING you may have life in his name.

That is to say, you have the word WRITTEN in the pages of the Bible. The Bible, God's Word, testifies to this greatest of signs. It is THE sign that matters. All other signs Jesus did built up to this great sign. This sign says that Jesus is Lord over sin, death and the devil.

It reminds me of a time when some "sign seekers" came asking Jesus for a sign. Jesus replied:

No sign will be given, EXCEPT the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

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Jesus was speaking of the sign of his resurrection. It, Jesus said, is the sign that matters. It is the sign that VALIDATES your faith whether or not you see signs in your personal life.

So

- when you are assaulted by the devil;
- when he sends his darts of deception and misbelief;
- when he drives the arrow of despair -

take up the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The written and spoken Word of God gives you Jesus who

- went into battle
- perfectly armed against the devil

Jesus emerged from the battle, the Victor. His victory is your victory by faith. It will be your victory by sight when he brings you home. Amen!