

INTRODUCTION

This is the seventh message from my verse-by-verse series from 1 Thessalonians. Our theme is "Finding HOPE in a HOPELESS World." This message is entitled, "Don't Let Satan Stop You."

The devil is the root source of all the world's problems. An old deacon used to pray the same prayer every week. He would say, "Lord please clean out all the cobwebs in my life." Week after week he prayed the same prayer. "Lord, please remove the cobwebs from my life." Finally the pastor had heard enough and after the deacon finished he prayed, "Lord, I've got a better idea. Please kill the spider."

Hardly a week goes by that we don't get the news of another example of human evil or natural disaster. Sadly, when some people look around at the presence of evil and suffering they shake their heads and think we live in a hopeless world. What's going on when a gunman fires into a Mother's Day parade? Or when tornados continue to rip through schools? Or when crazed radical Muslims attack a British soldier in his own neighborhood? If you only look at those signs, it would seem hopeless, even senseless.

But remember, there is NO HOPE to be found in this world. Our only source of HOPE is in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Only then do we discover H.O.P.E., Having Only Positive Expectations.

But people still wonder *why* there is so much disaster and evil in our world. There is one very important truth we can never forget. There exists in this universe a living source of evil: Satan is real. Jesus recognized him. In fact He called him the Father of lies. Jesus gave us Satan's job description: He kills; he steals; he destroys; he tempts, he accuses; he shames; he confuses; he discourages. His name is Lucifer, and the title Satan means "adversary."

The devil resisted Paul's efforts to return to his friends in Thessalonica. And we need to be aware there are times that the devil tries to stop us from doing what God wants us to do.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20. "But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan stopped us. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5. "So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless."

Many of you of my generation and older remember radio commentator Paul Harvey. I can still hear his crystal clear voice saying: "Hello, America. This is Paul Harvey! Stand byyyyy for Newwws." But he did more than give the news; he provided a social commentary. Paul was a committed Christian and he was deeply disturbed with the moral decline in America. In 1966 he shared one of his most famous monologues. He described what he would do he were the devil. His thoughts from fifty years ago have actually become a chilling prophecy of what we see happening in our country today.

"If I were the Prince of Darkness ... I'd set about however necessary to take over the United States. I'd subvert the churches first. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve, 'Do as you please.'

To the young I would whisper that the Bible is a myth. I would convince them that what's bad is good and what's good is boring. And the old, I would teach to pray after me, 'Our Father, which art in Washington ...' If I were the devil, I would encourage schools to refine young intellect but neglect to discipline emotions—just let them run wild. And before you knew it, you'd have drug-sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door.

I'd have prisons overflowing and judges promoting pornography. Soon I would evict God from the courthouse and the schoolhouse and then from the houses of Congress.

If I were the devil, I'd take from those who have and give to those who wanted until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun; that what you see on TV is the way to be.

And thus I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure. In other words, if I were the devil, I'd just keep right on doing what he's already doing." Paul Harvey ... good day

No Paul, sadly, it's a bad day.

Satan is real. And if you aren't a believer, his #1 strategy for you is to keep you from coming to faith in Christ today. If you're listening to me right now and you aren't yet a Christian, don't be surprised if your mind is being filled with all kinds of weird thoughts and distractions. The devil is like LeBron James defending a shooter to prevent him from scoring. The devil tries to prevent you from hearing and responding to the gospel.

But once you become a Christian, the devil doesn't give up on you. He just changes his strategy. From that point on, he tries to STOP you. Paul said he wanted to visit Thessalonica, but the devil stopped him; he hindered him. That's a strategy he uses with believers as well. The devil wants to stop you. He and his demons want to stop you from reading your Bible; stop you from praying; stop you from attending worship; stop you from giving to God; stop you from witnessing; stop you from serving God; and stop you from growing in your faith. Get the idea? He wants to stop you from doing what God wants you to do.

So how should we respond when Satan tries to hinder us? Let's learn three important lessons from Paul.

1. When Satan tries to hinder you, REALIZE THAT GOD ALLOWS IT

Can you think of a time in your life when you were really trying to do what was right, but it seemed your efforts failed at every point? You may be going through the scenario right now.

One of my mentors, Ray Stedman, had this to say about Satan's hindrance: "Have you ever experienced a frustrating time in your own life when again and again you tried to do something you knew was right and found it hard going? You met opposition and hindrance, perhaps even from your own family. That is satanic hindrance, the psychological manipulation of minds to arouse opposition and plant obstacles in your path."

Satan and his demons will try to hinder you, but they can only do what God allows them to do. One of the biggest mistakes Christians make in relation to Satan is that they consider him to have unlimited power. Lucifer is a fallen angel; he isn't the dark side of the force. He isn't omnipotent. Only God is omnipotent. Satan doesn't have unlimited power. God permits Satan to tempt us and to challenge us because He knows when we endure adversity, it builds our character.

We confirm this from the story of Job. Satan and God were talking one day and God said, "Have you noticed my servant, Job? He's a fine man, don't you think?" But Satan didn't think so. Instead Satan said (about Job), "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." (Job 1:10-12)

Fortunately, we know the end of the story of Job. The end of his life was more blessed than the beginning. But the lesson we learn is that God allowed Satan to torment Job. But God limited Satan's power. I'm convinced Satan's power is limited in relation to God's children. He can hinder us, but he cannot hurt us. He can scare us, but he cannot scar us. God limits Satan; and God permits his attacks against us.

When I was in the fourth grade I used to walk home from school; it was in the snow and uphill both ways...not really. This was in LA—Lower Alabama—and it was a pleasant walk of about three miles. My regular route was along the main street, but one afternoon I tried a new route through a neighborhood. I was walking by one house and to my horror, I heard the deep bark of a large dog and it was angry. Back then, there were no fences or leash laws. A huge, white German Shepherd was running at me, barking furiously. I had always been afraid of big dogs, so I started to run as fast as I could. I glanced over my shoulder and saw to my relief this dog was tied to a chain, and when he reached the end of the chain, he stopped and kept barking. I was safe because the chain limited that big dog from biting me. I later learned this dog belonged to one of the teachers at our school, Mrs. Dean. She said his name was Stormy, and that although he liked to bark, he was a sweet dog. I didn't know if I believed her, but I was no longer afraid to walk by

her house. Every day, Stormy would still run out and bark at me, but I knew the chain limited his reach. In the same way, God limits Satan's power.

2. When Satan tries to hinder you, REMEMBER THAT SATAN MAY DISCOURAGE YOU, BUT HE CANNOT DEFEAT YOU

When Paul tried to visit Thessalonica, Satan stopped him. Paul was disappointed and discouraged with this setback, but he wasn't defeated by it.

Discouragement is one of the chief ways Satan tries to stop us. There's a fable about a day when the devil had a yard sale. His demons showed up to shop. All of his tools were on display for sale. They were labeled with price tags: anger, hatred, lust, murder, and all the rest. At the end of the table was a tool without a label, but it had the highest price of all. One demon asked, "What is that?" The devil said, "That's my main tool. It's discouragement." The demon said, "What is it priced so high?" Satan said, "Because most people don't know it's mine."

He isn't all-powerful, but he is strong. He isn't all-knowing; but he is cunning and clever. He's not all-present, but he has an organized, demonized, mobilized army assisting him. But the good news is we have authority over Satan in the name of Jesus.

Another tool of the devil is fear. We need to be watchful and careful against Satan, but we need to understand that he is powerless to cause us real harm. The Bible says, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8)

When you think about the devil being symbolized by a lion; that may strike fear in your heart. But when you go to a zoo and see a lion in a cage, you don't go running away screaming for help. You aren't going to jump in the cage, but you know that the bars of the cage limit the lion's reach.

Satan is like a lion, but this satanic lion isn't attacking; he's prowling. He isn't biting; he's roaring. He isn't eating; he's looking for someone to devour. In the jungle a lion often roars to frighten the prey. The prey is so terrorized they don't even run. Chomp. Chomp.

Satan wants to keep you so afraid of him that you are spiritually paralyzed. He tries to stop Christians using fear and discouragement.

Of all of Aesop's fables, one of the strangest and most obscure is entitled, "The Lion in Love." Consisting of only five sentences, it's also one of the shortest fables. The story goes: "A lion demanded the daughter of a woodcutter in marriage. The father, unwilling to grant, and yet afraid to refuse his request, came up with this plan to deal with the lion. He expressed his willingness to accept the lion as the suitor of his daughter on one condition: that the lion should allow him to extract his teeth, and cut off his claws, as his daughter was fearfully afraid of both. The lion cheerfully assented to the proposal. But when the toothless, clawless lion returned to request to marry his daughter, the woodman, no longer afraid, set upon him with his club, and drove him away into the forest."

What's the point? Since the cross of Calvary, Satan has been a toothless, clawless lion. The Bible says, "That through death He (Jesus) might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Hebrews 2:14-15 NKJV)

So, don't let Satan use discouragement or fear to stop you or hinder you. I agree with Virginia Boyson who wrote: "Our enemy is defeated! He is a toothless lion who makes a lot of noise! Jesus is our victor and it is He who has removed the sting of death from our enemy, knocking out his teeth. He has given us His victory and there is now more authority in even the youngest babe in Christ than there is in Satan's whole demon lair. For "Greater is HE who is in you, than he who is in the world!" (1 John 4:4). (*More Than Conquerors*)

3. When Satan tries to hinder you: FIND ANOTHER WAY TO FULFILL GOD'S WILL

Paul wrote that he tried over and over to visit the people in Thessalonica, but each time Satan stopped him. So, what did Paul do? Did he just say, "Okay, Satan, you win?" Did he give up on the Thessalonians and say, "Well, it must not be God's Will for me to go there?" If that had been his attitude, then we wouldn't have the letters of First and Second Thessalonians.

Satan stopped plan A, but Paul knew there was more than one way to skin a toothless lion. He didn't give up. He fulfilled God's will in two different ways. First, because he couldn't go, he sent Timothy as his representative. Sometimes when we can't go where we think God wants us to go, we can send someone else. We've seen that happen many times at Green Acres.

Ann Steger, one of our charter members and a great lady, went to be with the Lord and joined Bill in heaven a few months ago. She had always wanted to go to Israel, but her health wouldn't allow her, so what did she do? She gave the money so another younger couple could go.

Satan couldn't stop her. We have folks in our church who have a heart for missions in areas around the world where they are unable to visit, but they provide money to send someone in their place. That's what Paul was doing when he sent Timothy.

The next thing Paul did was to write to the members of the church. We're reading his words today. He couldn't come in person, so he came in the form of a letter instructing and encouraging them. Like Paul, we can still only be in one place at one time, but we can send ourselves to others by different means of communication. Sometimes you may not be able to be where you want to be, but you can communicate with a phone call, email, text, tweet or even the old fashioned hand-written letter still works!

Paul didn't let the devil hinder him from communicating his love to the congregation. And since Paul couldn't go to Thessalonica, where did he go? He went to Berea where they received the word with gladness. And then he went on to Athens where he preached the gospel to the philosophers at the Areopagus. What an audience! I can imagine when the devil saw Paul preaching to these influential men he must have slapped his head and said, "Oh, I should have let him go to Thessalonica!" In other words, when the devil hinders you, live your life in such a way that the devil will think he messed up.

The devil is more powerful than we are, but we have been given authority in the name of Jesus to stand against him. The Bible says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7) Those aren't two different commands. They are two parts of the same action. As we fully submit ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus, then we can resist the devil and he will flee from us.

The devil will try to stop you, but the truth is you can stop the devil. Jesus has given us authority over the devil. There's a difference between power and authority. Do you understand authority? Imagine a highway here in Texas. There is an 18-wheeler rolling down the road, and a man steps out a couple of hundred yards in front of the truck and holds up his hand. That man is wearing a DPS uniform. Now, who has more power, the truck or the man? The truck, of course. But what happens? The truck driver stops, if he knows what's good for him, because the State Trooper has been given the authority to stop vehicles.

Remember that big white German Shepherd? I stopped being afraid of it, but I still gave it wide berth. One afternoon I was walking by and Stormy came barking at me usual. But this day something was different. Somehow, his collar had slipped off and I saw that he was no longer restricted by the chain. I started to run, but I knew that I couldn't outrun him, so in that instance, God gave me the courage to hold out my hand and shout, "Stormy! Stop!!!" And (screeching sound) Stormy stopped and started wagging his tail. I backed away slowly saying, "Nice Stormy. Good dog." I think it was because I knew his name and spoke with authority that he stopped. We all know Satan's name and we have his number. We can resist him in the authority of Jesus.

By a show of hands, how many of you ever have trouble with Satan's temptations or his hindrances? Congratulations because that's definite proof that you're on the right side. Satan is your enemy. I've met some Christians who confess that they don't have much trouble from the devil. They think all this talk about resisting Satan is a waste of time. Former baseball-player-turned-evangelist Billy Sunday used to say. "If you aren't meeting the devil every step of the way, it could be because you and the devil are going in the same direction. Turn around and start living for God, and you'll be running into the devil all day long."

Billy Sunday was very blunt. He used to say, "Some people say I'm rubbing the fur on the cat the wrong way, but I say turn the cat around. That old cat is heading toward hell."

Many modern people don't believe in the devil, but Jesus did. And so did Paul. Paul knew Satan, and even more importantly, Satan knew Paul. How do we know? There's an account in Acts 19 where seven sons of a Jewish priest named Sceva were attempted to exorcise a demon from a troubled man. They called for the demon to leave in the name of Jesus. The demon in the man said, "I know Jesus, and I know Paul, but who are you?" Then the man jumped on the seven exorcists and beat them up. What an honor! The devil and his demons know who Paul is. Do they know you by name? Leonard Ravenhill wrote: "My main ambition in life is to be on the devil's most wanted list." Are you on the devil's hit list or are you on his do-not-disturb list?

CONCLUSION

I don't really like to devote a whole message to Satan, but I enjoy exposing him for who he is—a defeated enemy.

Joe Page used to pitch for the New York Yankees. He said he had a dream one night that he was in heaven and God asked him to put together a baseball team to play against the devil's team—no miracles, just straight baseball. Joe knew they were going to win because all the greatest ballplayers were in heaven. But before the game, the devil called Joe up and asked him if he wanted to bet on the game. Joe said, "We've got the best players in history, so that wouldn't be a fair bet." The devil said, "Well, I'm certain my team will win the game."

Joe said, "What's makes you so certain?" The devil said, "We've got all the umpires!"

That's a cute story, but the devil is the all-time loser. The next time he tries to throw an obstacle in your way, just look for a way to resist him. Don't fear the devil. He tries to intimidate you, but in the name and the authority of Jesus you can have victory over the devil.

I've got to admit I like the way some African American preachers preach. They have a way of putting it in sermonic overdrive if you know what I mean. I'm certainly not a black preacher, but if I were, I would probably say something like this: Satan is a defeated foe. He has no authority over you. He can despise you, but cannot devour you; he can delay you, but he cannot delete you; he can depress you, but he cannot not deprive you; he can demoralize you, but he cannot devastate you. The devil is a burned-out, two-bit, has-been, wanna-be who knows that he will someday wind up in hell. He's not happy and he's taking it out on us. But don't you worry none because he can debase you, but he cannot deny you; he can defraud you but he cannot not defeat you; he can debate you but he cannot demote you; can deride you but he cannot deplete you; he can detest you, but he cannot devalue you; he can denounce you, but he did not design you; he can demoralize you but he cannot demolish you; he can deflate you but he cannot defile you; he can deceive you but he cannot decimate you; he can desire you but he cannot destroy you. And just remember this: he may deplore you, but he can never deport you! Hallelujah! Satan isn't alive and well. He's alive, but he hasn't been well since the cross. That's where he received a mortal wound to his head.

And the next time Satan tries to stop you, just say, "Lucifer, you can try to stop me, but you can't stop me. In fact, you're the one that's been stopped. You have no place in my life. I have already overcome you by the blood of the lamb, by the word of my testimony, and by my trust in Jesus that will see me all the way to heaven!"

OUTLINE

When Satan tries to hinder you:

1. Realize that God allows it

Satan said (about Job), "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." *Job 1:10-12*

2. Remember that Satan may hinder you, but he cannot defeat you

"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." *1 Peter 5:8*

3. Find another way to fulfill God's will

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

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes