

## BE WISE TO SATAN'S TACTICS

- A. Introduction: We're discussing the importance of praising God continually even in the face of life's trials. Praise to God glorifies Him and opens the door to His power in our circumstances. Heb 13:15; Ps 50:23
1. To praise God in its most basic form means to acknowledge Him by talking about who He is and what He does. It's not an emotional response to God. It's the appropriate response. It's always appropriate to praise the Lord for His goodness and His wonderful works. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
    - a. This is an act of your will. You make a choice to rejoice. You chose to acknowledge and praise God no matter what you see or how you feel. Hab 3:17-19; II Cor 6:10
    - b. James 1:2-4--When you encounter a trial, you consider it an occasion to rejoice. When you rejoice you encourage yourself by proclaiming the reasons you have hope even in the worst circumstances.
      1. It's not the trials of life that defeat people. If they did everyone would be defeated because all of us have troubles. It's our response to the storms. Matt 7:24-27
      2. The one who hears and does God's Word will still be standing when the storm is over. God's Word to us in the hard times is always: Count it all joy.
  2. In connection with our topic we have been discussing how the devil works because, when troubles come our way, we are more vulnerable to his strategies. The devil takes advantage of the situation in an attempt to steal God's Word by enticing us to disbelieve or disobey. Mark 4:14-17; Matt 13:18-21
    - a. Nowhere does the Bible tell us to beware of the devil's power. Rather it tells us to be wise to his mental strategies. It's clear from scripture that the devil is able to present thoughts to our mind to influence us. II Cor 2:11; II Cor 11:3; Eph 6:11; Gen 3:1-6; Matt 16:23; etc.
    - b. The battles of life are won in our mind. Praise stops the enemy and stills the avenger because it helps us shut down the mental attacks of the devil. Ps 8:2; Matt 21:16
- B. The Epistle of Hebrews was written to Jews who had accepted Jesus as the Messiah. However they were facing increasing pressure from non-believing Jews to reject the Lord and His sacrifice at the Cross. The author wrote the letter to encourage them to stay faithful to Jesus no matter what.
1. In that context Paul wrote Heb 12:3. We aren't going to look at every idea in this verse right now. Just note this point: Paul was concerned that they would grow weary in their minds--Wear out with despondency (Beck); get tired and give up (Beck); lose your purpose or your courage (Phillips).
    - a. The word wearied means weary from constant work. Mental exertion can be much more tiring than physical toil because it's hard to turn it off, whereas you can stop doing physical labor.
      1. When we encounter trouble, thoughts come and questions begin to fly: What am I going to do? How will I survive? Why did this happen? It seems so unfair!
      2. These are all natural, reasonable thoughts and questions. But the devil takes advantage of them and us if we don't know how to rightly answer the thoughts and questions from the Word of God. He adds to and inflames our thoughts. God's Word is our armor. Eph 6:10-18
    - b. The devil presents our minds with lies about God, ourselves and our circumstances in an attempt to wear us down. Remember, his goal is to persuade us to disbelieve or disobey God's Word.
      1. The Greek word translated devil is DIABOLOS (DIA, penetration) and BALLO, to throw). It literally means hitting something again and again until you penetrate it.
      2. I Sam 17:8-11--Just as Goliath bombarded Israel for forty days twice a day to intimidate, so the devil does to us. He keeps firing thoughts at us until one sticks and we act on it. And, just as these constant attacks made Israel hopeless and fearful they do the same to us.
    - c. Heb 12:3--Paul's admonition to the Hebrews to prevent them from wearing out mentally was: Consider (contemplate) Jesus. Praise helps us put and keep our focus on Him.
  2. When troubles arise we have to think about how we're going to handle it, what we're going to do. But many times either we don't know what to do or there is literally nothing we can do.
    - a. We have to fight the tendency to obsess. Obsession comes naturally to us. To obsess means to

preoccupy intensely or abnormally. To preoccupy means to engage, engross the attention of beforehand (before it happens). When you obsess, your issue is all you can think about.

1. Going over and over something for which there is no apparent workable solution is a waste of time and actually counter-productive because it undermines your faith, further stirs up your emotions, and saps your strength. You grow weary in your mind
  2. When you obsess you begin to borrow tomorrow's trouble by focusing not on what is actually happening but on what might happen in the future.
- b. Jesus specifically tells us not to borrow tomorrow's trouble. In the context of worrying about where life's necessities will come from Jesus said: Take no thought or don't worry. Matt 6:25
1. Jesus stated that worry is produced by taking (accepting, obsessing over) thoughts such as: What will I eat or drink? What will I wear?
    - A. Worry or anxiety is uneasiness of mind over an impending or anticipated ill (Webster).
    - B. v34--So never be troubled about tomorrow (Moffatt) for tomorrow will bring its own anxieties (20<sup>th</sup> Cent). One day's trouble is enough for one day (Phillips).
  2. The word translated "take no thought" literally means distraction. v26-33--Jesus said: Don't be distracted from the fact that God is your Father and He cares for you. He takes care of birds and flowers. He'll take care of you because you matter more than a bird or flower.
    - A. In other words, deal with those thoughts that produce worry by putting your focus on God's character (He's a good Father) and His works (He takes care of His creation) instead of tomorrow's troubles.
      - B. When you proclaim those facts out of your mouth (praise God) you get control of your mind because you can't think one thing and say something else at the same time.
3. Fear of the unknown is tormenting. Recognize that the fear of something is always worse than the thing itself. Even if the anticipated event is horrific it takes place and is over. You deal with it and adjust to whatever it brings. But the worry and its torment goes on for days, weeks, months, years.
- a. Back to Israel when they faced Goliath. For forty days, two times a day, he presented them with: If you lose you become our slaves. They obsessed over the "what if", what if we lose. By the time David showed up they were discouraged and very afraid. They were wearied in their minds. v11
    1. Note, the "what if" didn't even happen. They won because David had the good sense to believe God's Word (Lev 26:7,8) So Israel endured forty days of unnecessary torment which actually immobilized them from taking effective action.
    2. Did David have to face any "what if" challenges in his mind? There's no reason to think not. It worked so well on the entire Hebrew army it's highly unlikely the devil didn't tempt him.
      - A. How can we say the devil was at work when the text does not say so? Because Paul, who was given so much information about how the devil works, recorded that the devil has been working on people's minds since the days of Adam and Eve. II Cor 11:3
      - B. Paul also wrote: I Cor 10:13--No temptation has come upon you that is not common to all mankind (20<sup>th</sup> Cent).
    3. But David put his focus on God by acknowledging Him as he went to battle. v34-36; 46
  - b. We can silence the "what ifs" in our difficulties by asking ourselves: What's the worst thing that can happen here? Then we need to ask ourselves: Is it bigger than God? No, not ever. Never!
    1. Dan 3--Three Hebrew princes were threatened with death in a furnace for refusing to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden statue. What thoughts did they have? What would you have?
    2. v17,18--They shut it all down with: Our God is able and will deliver us. But either way we aren't going to worship your image. This isn't a "bad confession". This is looking at the worst case scenario and recognizing: It's not bigger than God. They went into the fiery furnace but survived. Had they not, they knew this was not the end. They would one day be restored to life on this earth. Dan 12:2; 7:27
  4. We have to put forth effort to call to mind God's character and works (praise Him), not because we are

deficient, but because of the nature of life in a sin cursed world.

- a. We were created with physical senses and emotions to live in a physical world and naturally gravitate to what we see and feel. In the face of sight and feelings it's easy to forget God.
  1. As infants, we experienced feelings and emotions before we had words or cogent thoughts in our mind. We have issues and warpedness in our soul (mind and emotions) that have become our automatic responses to life. (lessons for another day)
  2. We have an enemy who is very practiced at taking advantage of all these weaknesses to influence us through thoughts. He knows what "buttons to push".
- b. I Kings 17-19--Consider the great prophet Elijah. God raised him up when Israel abandoned the Lord to worship Baal under King Ahab and Queen Jezebel.
  1. At God's direction Elijah went to Ahab and decreed a drought (17:1). God supernaturally took care of Elijah (17:2-16). He raised a boy from the dead (v17-24). He challenged the prophets of Baal, his sacrifice was burned by fire from Heaven and all the false prophets killed (18:1-40). He prayed for rain and a rainstorm occurred (v41-45).
    2. Yet, when Jezebel heard what happened to her prophets and sent Elijah a message: You'll be dead by this time tomorrow, he became afraid and ran for his life (19:1-3). He fled eighty miles south into the wilderness around Beersheba. Consider his mental state.
      - A. v3--He sat down under a tree and prayed to die. He was completely discouraged to the point of despairing of life. Then he turned on himself: I'm no better than my ancestors. His fear turned to isolation and hopelessness: v14--I'm the only one left who is faithful to the Lord and the Baal worshippers are trying to kill me.
        - B. Fear is aroused when what is coming against you is greater than the power on your side. Hopelessness comes when you believe nothing can be done in your situation. How could Elijah possibly think that after all God's mighty power demonstrations on his behalf?
          1. James 5:17--Elijah was a human being with a nature such as we have -- a man with feelings just like ours (Williams); a man with human frailties like ours (NEB)
          2. Elijah was getting help with his thoughts. How do we know? I Cor 10:13
          3. This was a critical point in Israel's history. Despite the deaths of 850 prophets Baal worship was still alive and well threatening the knowledge of the True God.
            - A. The Lord instructed Elijah to: Anoint Hazael King of Syria (he would attack Ahab and weaken him), anoint Jehu as the next king of Israel (a ruthless soldier who opposed Baal worship and would take Ahab's throne while he was weak), and anoint his successor Elisha to finish the job of wiping out the followers of Baal. 19:15-19
            - B. God intervened to help Elijah because this was a pivotal moment in redemptive history. But remember, what is written in the Old Testament was recorded in part to help us avoid their mistakes and be encouraged with reasons we can hope. I Cor 10:6,11; Rom 15:4
5. There are times in life where we face extremely challenging circumstances and don't know what to do.
  - a. But instead of obsessing over "What am I going to do?" and focusing on the dire possibilities ahead we need to do what David and Jehoshaphat did: put our attention on God and praise Him.
    1. Ps 56:3,4--What time I am afraid I will trust in you. I will praise (boast about) your Word (your faithful promises to me). II Chron 20:12; 18-21--We don't know what to do but we look expectantly to you. We're going to praise You for your goodness and works before we see until we see your deliverance.
      2. This doesn't seem like the answer because it doesn't feel right or seem natural in the moment. But we aren't natural people. We're supernatural sons and daughters of God. I Cor 3:3
  - b. Praising God in the face of trials doesn't mean that your situation will suddenly stop being hard or that you will suddenly like where you are. Life in a sin cursed earth is hard but praise to God lifts us up and opens the door to His power. (more on that in a later lesson)
6. You can't do this unless your view of reality has been changed through the scriptures. That's why

God's Word is our armor in the face of life's hardships and the devil's temptations. His Word shows us the way things really are, not just how they look. It gives us behind the scenes information.

- a. A severe and long-lasting famine hit the Middle East, threatening the survival of Abraham's descendants, grandson Jacob and his sons and their families. Jacob sent his sons to Egypt for food.
  1. In Egypt was their long-lost brother, Joseph, whom they had sold into slavery many years earlier. He was now second in command in charge of a food storage and distribution program. Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him.
  2. He gave them the food they requested, but bound brother Simeon and demanded that they return to him with their younger brother Benjamin (still in Canaan).
- b. When the sons returned home and told all that happened to their father his reaction was: I've lost Joseph. I'm going to lose Benjamin, too. Everything is against me. Gen 42:36
  1. However in reality, he hasn't lost Joseph. He's about to be reunited with him. He hasn't lost and is not going to lose Benjamin (an example of borrowing tomorrow's trouble). Everything is going very well for him. He and his family are going to move for a time to Egypt where they will have food for the rest of the famine and a place to grow from seventy-five people into a nation of over a million.
  2. But Jacob's reaction discouraged himself and his family and created fear in them. Did the devil help him with thoughts and "button pushing"? Probably. But this shows us how important it is that we don't do the devil's work for him through not controlling our minds.
    - A. What could Jacob have done differently? He could have acknowledged God by recalling the many times in the past God had helped him and he could have recalled God's promise of future provision for him and his descendants. (whole lessons for another day)
    - B. We aren't faulting Jacob. We are making the point that this was recorded to help us look behind the scenes and be aware that there is more going on in our situation than what we can see. God is with us, working good out of bad, working to bring maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many as possible. (whole lessons for another day).

- C. Conclusion: Many of us are afraid of the devil based on Hollywood's portrayal of him and/or faulty teaching about how he works: we think he's behind everything that goes wrong in our lives. We're afraid to go into a dark room alone and we're rebuking Satan in out of car engine. Meanwhile he's firing thoughts of doubt, discouragement, condemnation and fear at our mind and we're accepting them.
  1. Hopefully you're beginning to realize that you must become aware of what's in your mind and what you speak out about God, yourself and your situation. When you learn to acknowledge God, speak out who He is and what He has done, is doing and will do, it stills the enemy's mental attacks.
  2. We don't need to be afraid of the devil. We need to be wise about how he works. More next week.