

Group Notes

Texts: Mark 4.1-20; Ephesians 6.10-17

Satan

Context and Background

Context (Parable): Jesus' parable about the sower and soils is the first parable found in the Gospel of Mark. Jesus used this parable to indicate both why he taught in parables and the importance of hearing and responding appropriately to his teaching. The main point of the parable concerns hearing. Hearing, in this context, involves more than listening but listening and engaging with what Jesus is saying. In this parable, Jesus described four different ways of hearing and responding to his words. The first way involves the response of indifference and the results of such a response.

Context (Ephesians): The letter of Ephesians is Paul's most thorough and complete theological statement regarding the nature of and calling upon the life of a follower of Jesus. In Ephesians 1-3, Paul describes the cosmic movements and implications of God's work through Jesus. In Ephesians 4-6, Paul moves to describe the outworks of God's movement in the everyday life of Jesus followers. The conclusion of his letter involves a statement that returns the believer to the cosmic stage found in Ephesians 1-3. As a follower of Christ, one experiences and is involved in both earthly and spiritual realities. While the work enabling one's earthly calling has been accomplished by God, Paul indicates that the experience of the spiritual dynamics of this work remain. Those that follow Jesus are not called to be involved in the outcome of these dynamics but are called to withstand/endure them by the power and strength of God. How one lives by God's strength and power is described as putting on the armor of God.

Background (Satan): In Scripture, Satan is portrayed as a real being with very real powers who stands opposed to God. The Bible does not provide a single text that illustrates the nature and work of Satan. However, by looking across Scripture, one may discern his character and work. Satan is a created being who is second in power only to God (Ez. 28.11-16; Is. 14.12-15). Though created by God and weaker than God, Satan rebelled against God and has sought to use his power to thwart God's plans for people from the beginning (Gen. 3.1-6). His main desire seems to be to separate people from a loving relationship with God (Rom. 8.37-39). That is, Satan seeks to destroy the relationship intended by God between Himself and His creation (See also 1 Peter 5.8-9). Satan is described as one who schemes against people (Eph. 6.11), one who is inherently sinful (1 John 3.8), one who is a liar (John 8.44), and one who seeks to deceive the whole world, at times masquerading as one sent from God to do so (Rev. 12.9; 1 Cor. 11.13-15). At the present time, Satan is in control of the present world system (2 Cor. 4.3-4). However, God has entered the world through the person of Jesus to wage warfare against Satan and his desires (Col. 1.13-14). In this war, God has won the victory through Jesus' death on the cross and his subsequent resurrection (Jn. 12.31-33). However, for some reason known only to God, Satan will remain a powerful and active force, moving about until God once and for all judges and binds him (Rev. 28.7-10).

The Text

Stealing the word (Mark 4.3-4, 14-15): Jesus is speaking to the crowd encouraging them to hear and respond to what he has to say (Mk. 4.3, 9). Those who willingly hear and respond are promised that they will see God bring about amazing and transforming works in their lives. However, Jesus indicates that hearing and accepting his words are not the only responses people make. Some hear what Jesus is saying and are like seed on the path. This seed is unable to take root because of the hardness of the soil upon which it lands. As such, the word which could bear fruit is taken away by birds (Mk. 4.3-4). Jesus interprets this as a person falling victim to the work of Satan himself (Mk. 4.14-15). According to Jesus, when one is hardened to the Word of God, they fall victim to a cosmic interplay much larger than themselves. They fall victim to the work of Satan whose sole desire is to deceive and thwart God's purpose for people (See *Satan*). By stealing the Word of God sown in their lives, Satan is in effect accomplishing his purpose, robbing these people of that which can transform their lives leading to the experience of God's desires for them.

More than meets the eye (Ephesians 6.10-18): As Paul draws the letter of Ephesians to a close he is encouraging his readers to live in light of the work of God in the person of Jesus. However, Paul calls his readers to recognize that more than meets the eye is involved in living this life. According to Paul, a host of forces stand opposed to those who seek to follow Christ. Paul describes these forces as not consisting of flesh and blood but as spiritual forces of evil (Eph. 6.12). While it is easy to think of these forces as "out there,"—Paul does describe them as being in the heavenly realms—it is more proper to view them as part of our normal existence, however just beyond our normal scope of view. In Jewish thought, the spiritual realm was not "out there" but all around us, part of our normal, everyday experience, only slightly hidden from view as if by a veil (See 2 Cor. 3.12-18). The interplay of this very real realm of existence had serious implications on one's ability to live and experience life as God intended. While one was not called to defeat these powers—this had already been done by God—one was called to endure or resist them by living in God's strength (Eph. 6.10). One was called to stand, almost in a defensive position (Eph. 6.10, 13 and 14). One stood by putting on God's armor, the very thing God Himself used to engage and conquer evil (See Is. 11.4-5; 59.17). By taking on that which belongs to God—righteousness, faithfulness, truth, peace, God's Word, and salvation—one finds the ability to live and experience life in Christ. What must be noted is that each of these, to a greater or lesser extent, is found and accessed through Scripture. Particularly, the gospel, God's Word, the path of righteousness, and descriptions of God's peace and faithfulness are found in Scripture. Thus, to avoid or resist Scripture is to resist and avoid that which belongs to God and enables us to withstand the efforts of Satan.

Application: Satan is real and he has one plan for our lives, that we miss the life God has for us. He does everything in his power to keep us from experiencing a loving relationship with God and the transforming power this brings to our lives. That said, Satan is not all-powerful. He can be resisted. God offers us Himself, His strength, the very things He has used to overcome Satan so that we might endure his onslaughts. Interestingly, much of what God offers us is found in God's Word. Thus Satan would like nothing more than keeping us from God's Word. When we resist or are indifferent to the words of God, allowing them to have no effect, we help Satan in his work and miss the experience of the transforming power of God within us.

Traffic: What's driving your life?

Discussion Guide 2

Mark 4.1-20; Ephesians 6.10-17

Getting Started: 10 minutes

- Using a pen/markers/crayons and paper, draw a picture that you feel best represents your understanding of Satan. Share your drawing with your group, seeking to explain briefly its meaning.

Diving Into the Text: 60 minutes *(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)*

Setting the Stage: *God has great plans for us. The only problem is that sometimes something gets in the way. Maybe we should say “someone” rather than “something.” Satan is real, as are other spiritual beings who oppose God. He would like nothing less than to keep us from experiencing life as God intends it. You would think that something like that would be pretty apparent. Trouble is it isn't. Maybe it is because the schemes of Satan are not always apparent, perhaps because he has learned to use what we find ordinary. Ronald Rolheiser wrote about these schemes when he said, “What blocks faith is that myriad of innocent things within our ordinary, normal lives which precisely make our lives comfortable: our laziness, our self-indulgence, our ambition, our restlessness, our envy, our refusal to live in tension, our consumerism, our greed for things and experience, our need to have a certain lifestyle, our busyness and overextension, our perpetual tiredness, our obsession with celebrities, and our perpetual distraction with sports, sit-coms, and talk shows. These are the antimystical forces of our time.”(The Holy Longing, Ronald Rolheiser, 217) Satan is real. The hope is that we have all we need to resist Him, God's strength. However, the key to accessing that strength is wrapped up in our willingness to listen, really listen. So, here I am once more, back to square one, asking the same question. Am I willing to listen?*

- “Satan is real, as are other spiritual beings who oppose God. He would like nothing less than to keep us from experiencing life as God intends it.” What do you think about this statement? How does it make you feel?
- Read Mark 4.3-4, 14-15.
- Jesus said that Satan works to take away God's word so that it bears no fruit in our lives. Can you give examples of how you have seen this happen? In your own life?
- Ronald Rolheiser argues that the forces used to keep us from experiencing life are actually common to our everyday experience. (See quote above.) How might Satan be using these “innocent things” from our ordinary lives to do his work in your life?
- Read Ephesians 6.10-17.
- Paul noted that the work of Satan was real, but that believers had hope because they could resist him. How does Paul encourage people to resist Satan?
- What might putting on the armor of God look like today?
- How might listening and responding to God's Word be part of putting on God's armor?
- How might your life look different if you acted upon Paul's instructions?
- What response, if any, do you feel God is encouraging you to make right now?

Wrapping Up: 20 minutes

- Prayer requests
- Group Prayer time
- House-keeping matters (assignments for the next meeting)