

“Old Tricks and How to Outsmart Them”

2 Corinthians 2: 10-11

Lifepath Church

November 12, 2017

We are finishing our sermon series on spiritual warfare. Next week I'm starting a new series, entitled "The Seven Promises" (show series graphic). It's based on the Seven Letters in the Book of Revelation. Jesus addresses seven letters to seven churches and it he makes, you guessed it, seven promises to Christians who remain faithful. And these promises are very strange: the right to eat from the tree of life; that we will not be hurt by the second death (what is the second death?); hidden manna and a white stone with a new name; so on and so forth. Seven promises that affect you and me. So that starts next week. This morning we'll wrap things up with spiritual warfare by address some (show graphic of today's sermon) "Old Tricks and How to Outsmart Them." What are some of the more common schemes that Satan uses to wreak havoc among God's people? Let's look at our passage for this morning: 2 Corinthians 2: 5-11. Listen now to the Word of God.....(Read passage in NLT).

Paul is writing to the little congregation in in the Greek city of Corinth that he had started some years before. Someone has caused division and strife within the church. It seems that, while Paul was away, the man tried to undermine Paul as their teacher and that caused division in the congregation with people taking different sides. Most people sided with Paul against the

man. The man is now claiming he is sorry. In this passage Paul tells them to forgive him and comfort him and welcome him back fully into the church family. Paul says that he too forgives the man. Even though the man was undermining Paul, Paul writes that the man actually harmed the church members of Corinth more than he harmed Paul. “I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven” (v. 10). And then he says that this process of healing and forgiveness is necessary “so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes” (2 Cor. 2: 11 NLT). Now, my first question is, “Why would Satan care about what is going on in some little church?” We’ve already talked about how Satan is the chief of the dark angels who rebelled against God. The Bible says he’s a pretty big deal. The Bible calls him both the “ruler of the kingdom of the air” (Ephesians 2: 2 NIV) and the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4: 4 NIV). The Bible says “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5: 19 NIV). Well, if Satan is that big a deal, why would he even bother messing with the likes of you and me? After all, who are we that us, our families, our congregation would even be noticed by him, much less that he would, to use the Bible’s term, scheme against us? Why are we that important? This is important to understand. If you don’t understand who you are, you are not going to understand the attacks Satan makes nor how to outsmart them.

So why are we that important? Romans 8 is one of the most beautiful and important chapters in the New Testament, but it is also one of the most difficult. Romans 8 says why we lowly human beings are so important: “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves who have been the first fruits of the Spirit, grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for our

adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8: 21-23 NIV). What this is saying is that God is going to set all of creation free from slavery to Satan and that is through us. As we are joined together with Jesus and filled with his Holy Spirit, we begin to be shaped in the image of Jesus. But we still wait on the “redemption of our bodies” (v 23). What does that mean? When Jesus returns we will be raised from the dead. And when we are raised from the dead, that will break the curse of sin that hangs over this universe. And we get the true hope, which is not simply “going to heaven when we die and leaving this world behind forever”. It’s “a new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21: 1 NIV) and resurrected glorified human beings who are truly fully made in God’s image so that “God’s dwelling place is now (here in this world) among the people” (Revelation 21: 3) and God’s presence shining through us removes all evil from the universe and the devil is no longer “the ruler of this world” or any other world. By becoming united in Jesus, you are the means by which God is going to throw the devil out and defeat him. And that’s why Satan bothers with you. You are more important than you realize.

That’s why Satan cares that you are becoming more and more conformed to the Image of Jesus and why he hates it. And also, that’s tries to destroy our relationships – our families, our churches. Lemme explain. That triumphant end of Revelation where it talks about the Golden City, the New Jerusalem, with its streets of gold so clear you can see through them. And it’s coming down from heaven to earth: “And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Revelation 21: 2 NLT). We get hung up on what a city made up of pure see-through gold floating down onto the earth would be like. Understand it’s describing you, the people of God. A city is never primarily buildings. When we say, “Houston rejoiced when the Astros won game seven of the World

Series,” we don’t mean that buildings jumping up and down and screamed and danced. It was people. A city is people. In the Bible Jerusalem often represents the people of God. Verse 2 calls the new Jerusalem calls the Bride, which is what the New Testament calls the church – the bride of Christ, because we are united with him spiritually. The city is gold because finally the people of God are redeemed and cleansed from sin, like pure gold that’s been purified. It’s see through because the light of God character shines through us. This Golden City represents the people of God fully what human beings were intended to be from the beginning – the Image of God. The Golden City descends from heaven to the earth because the ultimate goal of God is not to get people up to heaven, but to fill the earth with his presence and claim it for his own. And he does that by filling with resurrected immortal human beings who shine forth his goodness and his authority over the creation “and they will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22: 5 NLT).

And the reason for going through all of that is because a city is all about relationships. The vision of God’s fulfilled kingdom is people living together loving him and loving each other. What are the two biggest commandments? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. As little Images of God, we show forth who God is through the love in our relationships. And Satan in an attempt to keep the rule and reign of God out, does that how? By breaking relationships. He works to bring jealousy, and insults, and holding grudges, and misunderstandings, and turf battles. Broken relationships are the darkness that Satan dwells in. Which is why Paul talks about defeating the devil in terms of forgiveness. “I forgive whatever needs to be forgiven, I do so with Christs’ authority for your benefit, so that Satan will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes” (2 Cor.

10-11). Forgiveness and the healing of relationships is the way Satan is defeated. God forgives us. We forgive each other. Refusing to work things out and forgive.

We talk a lot about forgiveness in this place, because it is hard to do and it is easy to misunderstand. Forgiveness does not mean letting your abuser continue to abuse you. Forgiveness involves the one who has done wrong admitting the fault. Sometimes we want to forgive but the other person won't admit they did anything wrong and the relationship stays broken. Sometimes forgiveness is hard work. But the point for this morning is that forgiveness is a key to victory over Satan. How many times have you seen two people who won't talk to each other. We see marriages break up. We see churches split and divided. Always be looking to bring the healing. Always be looking to bring peace. Blessed are the peacemakers.

Churches are especially fragile. Understand that a church is an advance outpost for that Golden City that will one day descend. A church filled with people that love each other and show forth God's love to the community terrifies Satan, because it shows people what God's future for this world looks like. So, of course Satan focuses on churches. He will attack us any way he can, as we saw last Sunday in Sutherland Springs. But his favorite way to attack us is to get us to tear ourselves apart – through quarreling and fighting – just as he tried to do in Paul's church in Corinth. We can't really shine God's loving presence into the world if we are tearing each other down and tearing each other up, can we? Churches can get into fights over all kinds of things. You see many of them in Paul's letters. Fights over worship styles. Oh, we love to get in tiffs about music or how to do communion. We fight over who gets to do what and who gets their way. We quarrel over all kinds of things and the thing to remember is that the ultimate goal

is to show forth who God is by loving each other. And because we're all messed up, loving each other means forgiving each other and working it out.

One of the things churches fight frequently about is the same thing married couples fight about: money. If you don't have enough, you fight over what to cut. If you have too much money you fight about what to do with the excess. And some people think churches should never mention money because it's "not spiritual," nevermind the fact that Jesus talks about money quite a bit. And, of course, some churches have been really screwed up when it comes to money, with either the leadership being greedy or dishonest or everything being kept a secret and no one seems to know where the money goes. Money can bring huge divisions and conflict and make people give up on the idea of church altogether.

At lifepath we try to be transparent when it comes to money. We want to be as see-through as those streets of gold in the Golden City, with nothing hidden. That's how you build trust. The congregation sets the budget and you vote on it every December. The elders manage the money through the year and they try to keep you informed about where we are. They've asked me to let you know that since Hurricane Harvey hit, our giving has dropped pretty steeply. We aren't sure if Harvey is the cause, but right now we are about 60 thousand behind on the year. Each fall we ask people to make a pledge of what they can give in the next year. Our treasurer is the only one who sees the individual pledges, but she keeps the elders informed as to our general condition. The pledges are just an estimate. We know that sometimes people lose a job or they have a financial crisis or a hurricane floods their house. But it's also the case that sometimes people don't realize they've gotten behind in their pledge with what they said they would give.

So the elders have asked our treasurer, Carol Castro, to send out letters to update folks that made a pledge to let them know where they stand. Are you on track? Are you behind? Those letters go out probably tomorrow.

Now if you get a letter and you're behind, understand some things. It's not a bill. If you've had financial hardships, we understand. We don't want you to think that the only thing we care about is your giving. We care about you. The treasurer's email will be in the letter, and you might let her know, that you can't make it up, just so we know. Or you can say, Oh, I didn't know I was behind. I can catch up. If we have missed something, and your family needs some help or support, let us know.

In our almost ten years as a church, we've had more good years financially than we've had bad. But during the tough times, there have been moments when people didn't think we'd told them soon enough that there was a problem. "Hey, you should have told us." So that's what this is about. We're letting you know where we are. We have our regularly scheduled congregational meeting to set next year's budget on December 3 and the elders are going to propose a lower budget for 2018 than we had this year. Even though we're actually growing in attendance. Elders tend to be cautious. Which is good. We'll get through it. God is good. But there is a great possibility for the devil to jump into the middle of this and cause lots of conflict and hurt feelings. People walk away from churches because of money issues. They give up on God's people because they think it's all about money. And the important thing is, it's always about love. We love each other through the good times and the lean times. We love through the

brokenness because we forgive each other. In this case, I don't think there's conflict or forgiveness issue, unless our love grows cold.

Victory in spiritual warfare looks like you becoming more and more like Jesus. And that means loving people. And because peo

ple are broken, it means learning to love what's broken. And that means forgiveness. Which of course makes sense, because if we're supposed to look more and more like Jesus, we know that Jesus is all about forgiveness. It is through forgiveness that Satan is defeated, and we will not be outsmarted by his evil schemes.

Amen

Spiritual Warfare #4 Group Discussion

Begin the group discussion with a prayer! Ask the Holy Spirit to guide us in our discussion. Remember, you don't need to get through all the questions!

Start off with some general discussion about the sermon. What challenged you or informed you? Spend some time discussing the response to the message and the issues that it raised.

Read 2 Corinthians 2: 5-11

- In this passage Paul talks about fight within a congregation. Have you ever experienced conflict within a church? What did that look like?
- In this passage, what does Paul say is necessary to defeat the "evil schemes" of Satan? Does his solution make sense to you? Why or why not?
- What are some the reasons we give for not forgiving people? Are these good reasons?

- “Broken relationships are the darkness that Satan dwells in.” How have you experienced this to be true?

(if you have time) Read Revelation 21: 1-2, 18

- The pastor said that the city of pure gold “clear as glass” descending from heaven to earth, is the final picture of the people of God as we shall be. Which of the details of this description make the most sense to you? Which are the most puzzling?
- The pastor said that churches should be “advance outposts” of the city of gold. In what ways can that be true?

Conclude your group’s discussion with a time of prayer