

## ***Full Protection***

Luke 4:1-13  
Lent 1; Series C

After my senior year in college I had the opportunity to join eleven other college students on a trip to the Big Island of Hawaii. We were there for two weeks to lead a Vacation Bible School program for the mission Church in Waikoloa Village, on the Kona side of the island. While I was there I saw a lot of the island and learned a great deal about the natives and their customs. The pastor of the mission congregation wanted to impress upon us the firm belief that the natives had in supernatural forces and so the caution that a missionary had to take when working with the people and their beliefs. In order to make his point he told us a story about Night marchers in Hawaii.

According to Hawaiian legend, Night marchers are the ghosts of Hawaiian warriors. On certain nights these warriors come forth from their burial sites and march to sacred places. Anyone near their path can hear the chanting and see their torches. Natives even bless their houses and guard them with leaves of a particular plant in order to keep the Night marchers from crossing their path.

The pastor told us about one such Christian missionary that tried to confront the Night marchers in order to show the natives that these spirits were powerless. According to the Pastor's story, upon not succeeding as he had planned, the missionary fled to his home only to have the Night marchers follow him there and drag him with them.

Now, I have heard and read other stories about Night marchers and Hawaiian supernatural phenomena. Perhaps you have heard and read similar stories. My point in telling *this* story is not to validate the truthfulness of any one tale but rather to demonstrate that the widespread *belief* in supernatural forces is alive and well in many parts of our world. Moreover, the Bible very clearly testifies to the existence of the supernatural realm and the care that should be taken in dealing with it. In Acts 19:11-20 we read that the Sons of Sceva had to learn this lesson with the hard way.

The Sons of Sceva were some itinerant Jewish, non-Christian, exorcists who tried to imitate the exorcism work of the Apostle Paul. They invoked the name of Jesus in an attempt to cast out demons. Suddenly the man possessed by the evil spirit leaped on the Sons of Sceva, overpowered them in such a way that they fled out of the house naked and wounded (Acts 19:13-16).

The Bible is clear that supernatural forces and the supernatural realm are real. The Bible operates with the worldview that there are evil, demonic forces that are opposed to God, our Creator and his plan of salvation in this world. Satan himself is the fallen angel that has set himself up as the chief opponent of God. And like the pastor from Hawaii told me and my fellow travelers, one must be cautious when dealing with the supernatural.

I suspect that in America there are two popular beliefs concerning the supernatural, neither of which are consistent with Scripture. The first belief says that there simply is no such thing as God or any supernatural force. The world, as this belief goes, is the product of natural and material forces at work over the course of billions of years. So the natural is all

we have. The supernatural simply does not exist. This is the assumption behind macro evolutionary theory. It contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible.

The other popular American belief concerning the supernatural agrees with the Biblical record that the supernatural exists. Yet, it disagrees with the Holy Scriptures in that it assumes no caution is needed in dealing with it. We see this belief carried out when the supernatural is dealt with flippantly in our media. Groups of people even try to stir up supernatural activity and then catch it on film.

In Saint Peter's first letter to the early Christians, he uses imagery to describe Satan and his work in the world. He says, "Satan prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8). Peter assumes that Satan positions himself as the king of the world in order to deceive an entire world by distorting the truth and casting seeds of doubt. But how does Satan distort the truth and cast seeds of doubt upon God and his Word?

From the temptation scene in the Garden of Eden to the temptation scene of Jesus in the wilderness, Satan's tact is clear; he isolates the individual and then goes to work. According to Scripture, Satan does his most damaging work when we are alone. He attacks most severely when we are alone with our thoughts, vulnerable to self-pity, and ill-equipped with the power and knowledge to defend against his distortion of God's Word and the seeds of doubt he casts upon that Word.

The Christian writer and apologist, C.S. Lewis, understood that Satan likes to isolate and attack. Lewis wrote a Science Fiction trilogy exploring the idea of life on other planets. In his second book of the series, *Perelandra*, Lewis wrote about life on a planet by the same name. Perelandra is a peculiar planet in many ways. Most notably, its landscape is not fixed, but rather moves around and rotates. The only exception is a fixed land on which the God of Perelandra has forbidden anyone to stay the night. The other unique feature of Perelandra is that its creatures are still in right relationship with God. The Fall of Man has not yet taken place on Perelandra. As the plot progresses, the main character, Ransom, soon learns that another character named Weston has been possessed by a demon. The possessed Weston is intent on isolating the Eve-like creature of the island in order to convince her to disobey the rules of the land and stay overnight on the fixed land. Isolation, doubt, and distortion are the tools that Lewis emphasizes in this modern-day retelling of Satan's temptation in the Garden of Eden. We observe Satan using the same tools with the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.

In the scene of Jesus' temptation that we heard this morning, we observe a supernatural battle. After Jesus had been baptized and received the Holy Spirit, he is then led into the wilderness for forty days by the Spirit of God. He was alone and hungry. Then Satan showed up to do his work. Apparently, Satan has come either to test the strength of Jesus or to shake his conviction that he is God. Once he has Jesus alone, he attempts to carry out his purposes by casting doubt and distorting God's Word.

Satan gives three temptations. His first temptation attacks Jesus' physical state of hunger. He wants Jesus to doubt the earthly provision of his Heavenly Father. Similar to the temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, Satan appeals to the senses—what we can see, touch, and taste. Unlike Eve, Jesus is successful. Where Adam and Eve failed, this one

succeeded. And so Satan casts a second temptation, offering Jesus material wealth, earthly control, and worldly success. Once again Jesus evades Satan's scheme with the Sword of the Spirit—the written Word of God. Finally, Satan makes one last attempt, suggesting that Jesus prove his trust in the Heavenly Father by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple. This time Satan even uses Scripture, distorting it so as to lead Jesus astray. Yet, once more Jesus responds with the true Word of God and Satan flees.

The supernatural battle is done. Where Adam and Eve failed, this Second Adam, Jesus Christ, succeeded. Where you and I fail against Satan's tools of isolation, distortion, and doubt, Christ succeeds. Throwing caution to the wind, our Lord trifles with the supernatural. He is powerful enough to do it. He is strong enough to win. And he fights for you. He knows we have not the strength or the power. And so in mercy he fights for you. And he wins for you.

The very last verse of the temptation scene reads, "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time" (Lk 4:13). In Luke 22:3 we learn that the opportune time was when Satan entered Judas in order to pull the trigger on the chain of events that would lead to Jesus' death. Satan thought he had won. But you and I know that our God is not the God of the dead but of the living. He rose to new life to defeat Satan once and for all. God raised Jesus from the dead not for selfish reasons, not to prove he could do it. He did it because he loves you and the whole world he created.

You are worth the fight. God raises you to new life to participate in a resurrection like Jesus.' He forgives your sin. He washes away your guilt. He calls you his child. He unites you to Christ. And he gives you his Spirit.

The same Spirit that was upon on Jesus during his temptation is upon you. As one who is "in Christ" (Rom 8:1) and "in the Spirit" (Rom 8:9), he sends you out to fight. God knows the enemy. He knows that one must tread cautiously. That is why he arms you for battle. You see, the supernatural, spiritual realm *is* real. Satan *is* real. This is why the Apostle Paul writes to the Christians of Ephesus and says to them and all Christians, "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:11-12). Paul goes into great detail to describe the different parts of the armor of God. But there is one that is of particular importance that I want to mention—the Sword of the Spirit, the written Word of God.

The Sword of the Spirit was Jesus' weapon of choice and so it ought to be yours as well. So how well do you know the sword? Are you able to wield it against Satan's temptations, doubts, and distortions? This is why Bible Study is so important. This is why regular devotions are important. This is why we come Sunday to gladly hear and learn the Word. The supernatural, spiritual realm is real and it is not to be dealt with carelessly. You have one who fought the war for you and won. Even though the war is won, battles still rage on. Your victor has called you *today* to join him in the fight. Remember, he who is faithful will be with you. Amen.