Unmasking the Devil: The Accuser

See if this is the type of thing that has ever happened to you. A quick story... My wife Elaine and I have five grandchildren, two of whom are twin boys. They are Drew and Luke, and they're now eight years old. A couple of years ago both of them, their older sister, Paige and I were fishing at a pond that’s at the back of the property where we live in Loma Linda. I love fishing and I love fishing with our grandkids, but they're all pretty exuberant children and pretty excited about fishing themselves. So, when we fish together, I don’t get much fishing done personally. I spend most of the time baiting hooks, tying on lures, fixing tangled lines, de-hooking fish and getting them on stringers. And all the while I’m dodging treble hooks flying through the air all around me, being cast by hyper-enthusiastic little fisherpersons. At one point, Paige and Luke both had lures in the water, while I was correcting some problem with Drew’s rod and reel. Then a fish struck Paige’s lure. As she’s reeling it in I’m getting ready to field it. Then, a sizable largemouth bass slams Luke’s lure. So, I’m managing two fish coming in while trying to get Drew equipped so he can get back in the action. Well, twins have this twin thing going on that’s some kind of combination of competition and thinking the same thoughts at the same time. So while Luke’s battling to bring his lunker in, Drew rushes over, starts grabbing the line at the end of Luke’s fishing pole and hand-over-hand pulling the line in. Luke screams, “Stop it, Drew, that’s my fish!” He doesn’t stop. Paige’s fish is near the shoreline and she’s yelling for help. “Let the line go, Drew,” I say while trying to help Paige land her bass. Luke’s trying to grab at Drew, while Drew keeps pulling line in. “Drew, that’s Luke’s fish,” I insist. Paige is yelling, Luke is yelling, fish are flopping, Drew is pulling line. Complete chaos, and I cracked. I screamed, “DREW, YOU STOP; RIGHT NOW!” He looked at me, dropped the line, and ran into our house crying.

Now here’s what happened next, which may be the type of experience common to many of us. Immediately I started hearing messages in my mind. “What an awful thing to do. You are a terrible grandfather.” “You’re just a mean person, yelling at a little child that way.” “You have some nerve calling yourself a Christian and a pastor.” Immediate accusations, like they were stored up in my internal databank and just waiting to show up. Does that happen to anyone else? Something happens suddenly or over time, and you start hearing accusations in your heart and mind. It’s like a finger of judgement is being pointed at you, but the voice is inside you. “You are a terrible husband.” “Who would ever put up with a wife like you?” “You are a completely failure.” “You’re useless; no good to anybody; you are a flagrant waste of space.” “You’ll never measure up; you’re just not good enough.” “You’re ugly.” “You’re stupid.” “You’re a loser.” Any of this striking a cord with anyone?

Another voice was trying to be heard inside my head on the day that I broke our grandson’s heart. That voice said, “Okay, that was probably too harsh. How might you have handled that differently? What might have reflected Jesus more and what would reflect Jesus now? Go to Drew, talk to him, embrace him, and make amends.” That was a good voice. I am a Jesus-follower, so I know that voice to be the Holy Spirit of God loving me through what is called “conviction” – helping me to make course corrections and to grow more like Christ, even in a difficult situation. Conviction is different than accusation. That’s an important thing to know for those who follow Jesus and those who are considering doing so. Knowing the difference between these voices is knowing the difference between listening to God and listening to Satan. That’s what we’ll focus on today. As always, note-taking is encouraged. If something you hear is important enough to catch your attention, then it’s important enough to write down or type in.
God may be stirring something for you or for someone else. And continue your own daily time in the Word using the weekly Study Guide. Don’t take our word for it; get into the Bible yourself and engage God through it. A quick version of the Study Guide is available in your program, and you can get an expanded version at the Saint Paul’s website.

Last week we started a new message series, “Unmasking the Devil.” We want and need to be equipped with the truth about God’s enemy. We’re pushing past all the myths and all the entertainment theatrics about the Devil to discover exactly who and what it is and how God has equipped us to deal with it. We’ve already pinpointed some truths that are helpful:

- **First, The Devil is real.** However much we may want to relegate the Devil to just entertainment fantasy, he’s the real deal. Paul, the great evangelizer of the first century (for whom this church is named) said it this way: “**For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, and the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.**” Ephesians 6:12. He’s saying there is a force, a power, a presence, actively working against God and all that God loves. We can debate all we want to about how Satan came about, the truth is, that the Devil’s real. Now, it’s a mistake to become overly obsessed with the Devil or to pass off blame on the devil for everything. It’s equally dangerous to assume the Devil isn’t at work. The great Christian speaker and author C.S. Lewis said simply, “**You can give the Devil too much or too little attention.”** – C. S. Lewis. We can’t be over-occupied with the Devil, but it’s important to take the Devil seriously.

- **Last week we discovered that The Devil is a deceiver.** Historically Satan is known as “The father of lies.” The enemy attacks us both with outright falsehoods and even distortions of God’s own truths. A first century Christian leader named John, the writer of the book of Revelation in the Bible, described it this way: “**The old snake, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world...**” Revelation 12:9.

We’re going to continue unmasking the Devil today with another truth. One of the names given to Satan is the Greek work “Diablos.” **Diablos = “accuser”.** This is language from the legal world, both in the first century Greek-speaking world of the Roman Empire and now. It is the one who comes against us in a court of law. The accuser is the voice that says, “You are the thief! You are the cheater! You are the criminal! You are the murderer!” The accuser seeks to put a label on you that will stick and that will determine the outcome of the case.

This is what the Devil seeks to accomplish with us. The Devil will use words that other people have planted in our memory, messages we have received from around us, assessments of ourselves we’ve created in our own minds, or whatever to fire accusation at us. You fail to make the winning shot for your team, and the Devil comes roaring in with the message, “You are a loser!” A close relationship of some kind ends, and the accuser comes at you with, “Nobody’s ever going to love you; you don’t deserve to be loved.” A project at work for which you’re responsible goes belly up and you hear the message, “You’re a failure.” “You lose it and scream at your grandson, and the accuser says, “You’re a terrible grandfather and human being.”

People are crippled constantly by the accusations of the Devil, which define us in ways that stifle any kind of hope, joy, and thriving. And make no mistake about it, Satan has an endgame in all this. As long as he can throw accusations at you – that you’re worthless,
useless, ugly, a failure, bad, unredeemable or whatever, and as long as those accusations stick, then the Devil has neutralized you, and that’s one less soldier in God’s army. That’s one less person coming to an active faith in Jesus Christ. That’s one less life loving God, loving others, and serving the world. If we believe the accusations which the Devil wants to sink deeply into the very heart and soul of us, then we are neutralized. But it’s hard not to believe the accusations, isn’t it? Every day you and I encounter people dragging themselves through life under the weight of accusations from which they believe they cannot escape. Maybe some of those folks are us. So what do we do in the face of Satan, the Accuser? Keeping with the courtroom image, what do we do when we need a defense attorney; an advocate?

There’s a strong clue in a story from the Bible, in the book of a spokesperson for God known as Zechariah. Zechariah represented the heart of God at a time when many of God’s people had spent a generation exiled from their homeland, having been defeated by a mighty, conquering empire. Those who spoke for God, people known as “prophets” had warned the nations of Israel and Judah that their downfall would happen. They had not kept their covenant to be the nation through whom the light of God would be made known to all the world. By Zechariah’s time they were a people hearing a powerful message for nearly half a century – “You are failures! You are a complete disappointment to God.” The time came when many of the exiles were allowed to go back home, to a land scarred and abandoned, to a faith neglected, and in many cases lost. In that time a messenger from God, an angel gave Zechariah a vision. In the vision he pictured a priest of the Jewish faith named Joshua. “Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him.” - Zechariah 3:1. At that point Joshua represented the failure of all the faith leaders of the Jewish people, and Satan was right there to make the accusation stick. Zechariah saw the high priest Joshua standing in utter defeat, clothed in filthy rags instead of the fine pure robe required of priests in the Jewish faith. He had no hope of escaping the stinging words of the Accuser. In this law court in which Satan was the prosecuting attorney, he and all his people were guilty as charged.

But God would not have it. Satan may have been the accusing prosecutor, but a mighty defense attorney, an advocate stepped in for Joshua. “The Lord said to Satan, ‘The Lord rebuke you, Satan! The Lord, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?’” Zechariah 3:2. God said, “I defy and overrule your accusation, Satan. You say he is a failure. I say he is chosen and rescued. And what I say stands.” And God didn’t just declare it. God made it happen. “Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, ‘Take off his filthy clothes.’ Then he said to Joshua, ‘See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put fine garments on you.’” - Zechariah 3:3-4 Whatever fouled accusation is draped over us and sticking to us, whatever message is embedded in our mind that we can’t shake, God removes it and places a new definition on us: we are chosen, loved, forgiven and made new.

Many point out that this vision of Zechariah is one of those instances in which there’s a hint or prototype of Jesus yet to come. The angel became the advocate for the high priest Joshua. What the angel in the vision did for Joshua, Jesus does for all of us. Satan fires accusation at us: you’re a sinner, a failure, a loser, a mess, and all that. But God steps in and declares all of that a lie. Here’s God’s truth about you. The God of the universe declares you worthy of the life, death, and resurrection of God’s own Son. And NO accusation of
Satan overrides this! Our God knows the deepest, darkest, ugliest depths of us – the areas in which Satan’s accusations will most likely take hold. And still a relentless and passionate God chooses us. God has given us a powerful defender, like the greatest of legal advocates: “…we have an advocate with the Father-Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” – I John 2:1. Jesus stands between us and all the accusations that seem to keep us from God and he advocates on our behalf against the Accuser. I love this statement that expresses the power of Jesus, our advocate, over the Devil: Satan knows your name, but calls you by your sin. God knows your sin but, calls you by name.”

So how do we live by truth and not buy in to the accusations of the Deceiver? How do we access the power of Jesus, our advocate? We have to make some decisions and take some intentional steps. Here are some ways to stay focused on Jesus and to disarm the Devil; the Accuser:

1. **Accept the Truth.** No matter how convincing the accusations in your mind may be, and no matter how much evidence seems to support them. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” – John 14:6. And he who IS truth says this about his original followers and all who would follow him since: “You did not choose me but I chose you.” – John 15:16. Regardless of what the accusations in our lives say, our ultimate definition is chosen by Jesus. If you have not yet said yes to this and to him, now is the time.

2. **Take your thoughts captive.** Sometimes we assume we have no power over our thoughts. This is exactly what Satan hopes we will assume. In fact, if Jesus claims Lordship over all of our lives, then he is Lord of our thoughts as well. We must consciously claim that, especially when the accusations invade our minds to distance us from God. Paul said, “…we take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ.” – II Corinthians 10:4. Let Jesus rule and overtake what comes into your mind. Make every thought submit to Jesus, your advocate.

3. **Learn the difference between conviction and accusation.** There are times when we are doing the wrong things, drifting from Jesus, failing to love others, failing to grow as Jesus followers, and not doing our part to lead others to an active faith in Jesus Christ. In those times messages will come to us and thoughts will enter our minds, from outside of us or from within us, that come from God’s Holy Spirit. They may be unsettling or even painful. But they are designed to bring us closer to God and closer to our call to love God, love others, and serve the world. This, sometimes stinging process is called “conviction.” Here’s the difference: **Conviction brings us closer to God; Accusation drives us farther from God.** We have to learn the distinction.

4. Also, when Satan’s accusations assault us, we need to **Keep serving.** We can get so discouraged under assault that we just give up whatever ways God has equipped us and called us to serve in and through the Church. Again, this is the enemy’s endgame. We each have to make an intentional effort to bear down on where God has placed us in ministry. The next person who needs to meet Jesus and see Jesus through us is depending on it.

5. **Finally, Don’t face the accusations alone.** Like a predator in the wild, Satan seeks those who are isolated. Life is better done together because we’re stronger together. Depending on where you are in life, wherever you need to be: home groups, life groups, Bible studies, classes, Wednesday Night Live, or any of the ministries we support –
Celebrate Recovery, Circles-Out-of-Poverty, and others...get with other people who are seeking to stay focused on Jesus and to overcome God’s enemy, just like you.

No matter how Satan may be seeking to accuse you and label you right now, and in spite of his greatest efforts to convince you that those accusations and labels are accurate, it’s all a lie. I’m not minimizing what you’ve been through, the damage that has been done to you or the damage you have done, the responsibility you bear, the reconciliation or restitution for which you may be responsible, or any realities of your present situation. Even so, this is the truth about you: You are God’s child, no matter what, claimed by the One who died and rose for you. It’s like this: Several months after crushing the spirit of our grandson by the pond, and after hugging it out and making amends that day, we were at a big family gathering. My heart was heavy that particular day because of some hardships going on in the lives of some people Elaine and I love. When I feel like that I try hard not to show it to our grandkids, but I guess I don’t give them credit for being sharp enough to sense that. Our twins introduced me to fidget spinners that day. (They were kind of last year’s popular time-waster.) Drew had one that lit up. I’m pretty easily distracted and entertained, and I never really have grown up, so I was pretty mesmerized by this. I said, “That’s really cool, Drew.” He looked at me for a moment and then said, “You can have it.” “No, Drew,” I said. “It’s yours.” “That’s okay, Poppy,” he said. “I want you to have it.” This is it... Seven years old, and this was his way of saying to me, “I don’t know what’s going on or how you feel about life and yourself right now. But this is who you are. You are someone who is loved by Drew, no matter what.”

That’s the way God sees you. And nothing in life, in death, or in life beyond death – and not even the power of the Evil One can change that. That’s what I believe. What do you believe? You think about that as we pray...