

## “The Real Battle” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent Midweek 2 February 28, 2024

- I. **Luke 22:39-62** – Previously read
- II. **When I was a kid, I loved Sherlock Holmes.**
  - a. The original stories were written back in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s.
  - b. I didn’t read any of the books, but I watched the TV shows and movies that were done with Sherlock and his sidekick, Watson.
    - i. He was the master of logical thinking, and I always loved how he would tie up the mystery or crime he was investigating with different clues.
  - c. One of the stories was about a crime wave in London... with blackmail, murder, and all kinds of other trouble.
    - i. As the investigation goes on, it’s apparent that a single person is behind it all: “Professor Moriarty”.
    - ii. Everyone else involved in the crime wave was just secondary.
    - iii. But Professor Moriarty was the guy pulling all the strings... so Holmes has to figure out how to outsmart and apprehend his enemy.
    - iv. Lots of other people play their roles to help Professor Moriarty, but he’s the real enemy... and even though he’s never around the scene of any of the crimes... he’s still the one behind it all.
  - d. You might be wondering what this has to do with our reading, as we consider Jesus’ suffering in the garden, His arrest, and then Peter’s denial.
  - e. First of all, how many people have a key part in this reading?
    - i. Of course, Jesus is the main person.
    - ii. Then there’s the twelve apostles (including Judas), some of the chief priests, the temple guard, a servant girl, and a few others.
    - iii. All of these people play a part, but Luke’s Gospel reading helps us to see the figure behind it all is actually satan.
    - iv. There’s Jesus... And there is His arch enemy, who isn’t even named in the verses that we read.
  - f. It’s interesting, but Luke’s Gospel is unique in the ways it portrays satan’s work in trying to undermine and defeat Jesus.
    - i. For example, after Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness, “And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Jesus until an opportune time”... satan would be back.
    - ii. Here’s another one, and you might remember it from our Ash Wednesday reading... as Luke writes about the Passover meal, saying that the chief priests were looking for a way to destroy Jesus.... And then he says, “Then satan entered into Judas called Iscariot ... and he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray Jesus to them.”

- iii. And then there is this one from last week's reading, "Simon, Simon, behold, satan has demanded to have you all, that he might sift you all like wheat."
- g. So yes, there are plenty of players in our reading, but satan is doing the directing, influencing, and attacking – he's behind it all.
- h. You might say that we only have two main figures in our reading... satan... and Jesus.

III. **Jesus is fully aware who's behind all this trouble.**

- a. He knows how hard the struggle against satan will be, so He tells His disciples in the garden that night to pray... because temptation is coming against you... the tempter himself is coming against you.
- b. Sure, everyone in the story thinks they are so smart... Judas and the chief priests are scheming to finally get rid of Jesus... but Jesus knows... that's why He says, "I used to be in the temple courtyards every day, and if you wanted to arrest Me as if I were a robber, you could have done it then. But it's happening now because this is your hour and even more ... this is the power of darkness."
  - i. The power of darkness—satan's power.
- c. Not only that... but even Jesus' own disciples fall for satan's attacks.
  - i. From the time that Jesus is praying... in the most unbelievable agony a person could experience... and they fall asleep rather than pray.
  - ii. To the betrayal of Jesus with a kiss... along with Peter's betrayal as he denies even knowing his Savior.
- d. And so, our reading shows this battle playing out, as the people and powers around Jesus are guided by satan to destroy Him.
  - i. And, for that time, satan wins... because he succeeds by breaking down the people around Jesus and sending our Savior to His death on a cross.
  - ii. What's amazing about all this is that Jesus knows all these things, but He willingly accepts it.
  - iii. The scene in the garden is moving... as Jesus is sweating blood from the agony of knowing His fate.
    - 1. The righteous judgment of God is a cup of wrath... and it's the cup Jesus must drink, even though He prays it would not be necessary.
    - 2. However, He submitted... He prays to the Father, "...not My will, but Yours, be done."
- e. In the end, we know how much satan hates God – so we can say without a doubt that satan meant all this for evil.
  - i. Yet God meant it for good...

IV. **Jesus, our suffering Savior, went to the cross in a great reversal.**

- a. First, it was a reversal because satan meant it for evil, but the result was victory over him and his schemes.

- b. Second, it was a great reversal because Jesus took our sins... all the times we are in line with satan... and He paid for them by His death.
  - i. We are no longer condemned, but as we believe in Jesus, our sins no longer separate us from God.
  - ii. Jesus took our sins, and we are given forgiveness, life, and salvation.
- c. Again, that's the amazing thing that underlies our reading – in all the evil that came against Jesus, God meant it and used it for good.
  - i. In all the times that good intentioned people were tempted to betray Jesus... to ignore Him... to trade Him in so they could save themselves... God meant it for good.
- d. It's important that we remember what God did to overcome evil... and still does through the work of Jesus on the cross.

V. **What does this mean for our faith and life today?**

- a. If we go back to Sherlock Holmes, it's kind of like if Professor Moriarty was locked up, but he could still cause trouble from behind bars.
- b. Satan has been chained up and kept from doing everything he would like to do... but he can still cause trouble from "behind bars".
- c. Satan still works evil in our lives, and we need to be aware of his subtle, behind the scenes influence.
  - i. In our world of technology and science, it's easy to overlook the spiritual – both good and evil.
  - ii. So, when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say, "deliver us from evil..." which actually means – "deliver us from the evil one."
    - 1. Also, our evening prayer from Martin Luther reminds us, "Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me."
    - 2. So, each day in prayer, we are reminded to be aware.
- d. Satan's goal is not only to tempt us to sin, but also when we do sin, he wants to discourage and condemn us for it.
  - i. Think about Peter – as he denies Jesus three times – can you imagine how he despaired?
  - ii. Can you imagine how satan tried to make it seem like there was no hope for Peter after such a terrible transgression?
  - iii. Yet, Jesus is always there to restore and forgive as we turn to Him.
- e. When the temptations and accusations are flying at you from satan, recognize the game he plays... recognize the way he operates... and grab hold of your baptism which promises that God has claimed you...
  - i. Not satan, not sin, not death... no, God has claimed you as His own.
  - ii. When you hide behind Jesus and your baptism, satan's schemes and games hit Jesus... Jesus, who took our sins on the cross and buried them in a tomb.
- f. The power belongs to Jesus, and the good that comes from His work flows into our lives by grace through faith.

g. Rest assured, satan's evil does not win the day... as his evil schemes have been overcome by the good that God intended for us. Amen. <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sermon based on: "You Meant It for Evil, but God Meant It for Good: An Ash Wednesday through Easter Sunday Sermon Series Based on the Gospel of Luke", Rev. Dr. Jeffrey Gibbs, Concordia Seminary Publishing, St. Louis, 2022