

Russell Kelfer

**When the Warfare
Gets Tough;
Let God Be God**

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Series: Let God Be God

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Let's be totally quiet quiet enough to hear a snowflake fall. Now let's assume that in the midst of that kind of quiet, suddenly, the roar of airplanes is overhead. It gets louder and louder until, all at once, bombs begin to fall. The sound of enemy aircraft fills the air. The sirens go off. You are awakened to the unbelievable reality that what you believed could never happen has happened. The enemy has attacked.

I suppose the horror of it all would be compounded by one startling fact...we were not expecting it; therefore, we were not prepared for it. And warfare not prepared for usually spells defeat. The purpose of this lesson is not to imitate the realistic horror films of a nuclear war being shown these days on television. In fact, what I want us to talk about makes nuclear war pale into insignificance. Because, as we read a lesson or two ago, our God is not threatened, nor should His people be, though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. (Psalm 46:2) No, a nuclear war should not be the great fear of the Christian. There is a war going on, however, even this moment, in this very place, ten thousand times more devastating than a nuclear war. It is more devastating because it is a battle for the souls of men and the results affect, not only this life, but eternity as well. And secondly, it is so much more deadly than a war between nations because it is taking place in the unseen world of the spirit. Therefore, man can actually be taken captive and not even realize it.

But, praise God, we have nothing to fear. For the God who lives in us has gone before us and actually experienced the same kind of warfare that we are now experiencing and emerged more than a conqueror. Therefore, in the midst of life's battles with the enemy, all the Christian has to do is to put on the armor and let God be God.

Today we will begin to take a walk in the footprints of the Master down the dusty roads of those Judean hills, into the narrow streets of the Holy City, into little fishing boats across the turbulent sea,

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into the temple, into the homes of publicans and sinners and up on a hillside to pray. We will follow Jesus these next few months as the Living God of eternity, the Creator of heaven and earth demonstrates in the marketplace of life, and even on the battlefields of life, how God behaves when He is allowed to be God in us.

And so we begin our journey. Of course, it is not accidental that the first major encounter in the life of God as He began to demonstrate Himself in man was to go head to head with Satan himself, clearly declaring the Christian life to be a call to battle. You see, the Christian life is a life of victory! But how can you have victory without warfare?

Our title is: “When the Warfare Gets Tough, Let God be God.” The outline looks like this:

I- The Preliminaries

II- The Participants

III- The Purpose

IV- The Preparation

V- The Particulars

The story is found in ¹Matthew 4:1-11, ²Mark 1:12-13 and ³Luke 4:1-13. We will use a combination of these accounts as translated from The Life of Christ in Stereo. It begins like this:

¹Then, ³Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan; ²and immediately the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness, where he remained for forty days and was with the wild beasts. ³And he was led by the Spirit in the wilderness; he was led up to be tested by the Devil.

THE PRELIMINARIES

First of all, we read of the preliminaries of the battle. In the Matthew account, the story begins with the word “Then” , indicating that it took place immediately following the incident reported just prior to this one. That incident, of course, was the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan by John, which was accompanied by the descending of the dove of God and the audible voice of God, who lovingly proclaimed,

This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

(Matthew 3:17b)

In other words, Jesus’ first great test followed Jesus’ first great victory. And so it is. Satan will always be poised for the conflict whenever God has just revealed Himself to be God in some way in

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your life. Jesus had just demonstrated His first great public act of obedience to His Father and had just experienced His first great public demonstration of approval by His Father.

Two things happen when we are in the throes of victory. One, Satan cannot stand the praise that is being accrued to God. Secondly, he knows we are likely to be caught off guard just after a major spiritual experience. Never forget it. Just after you lead someone to Christ and are exhilarated by seeing God demonstrate His great power; just after a great time in the Word and you are poised on the threshold of spiritual ecstasy; just after a moving message or great worship experience and your heart is filled with nothing but Jesus, at that moment, you can expect the enemy to descend from his perch and throw the book at you. Learn to expect it and you will be on your way to victory. For remember, the devil's greatest chance of throwing you a curve is to catch you off guard. When you expect him to attack, he has much less leverage.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Note the participants in the battle. There were three people mentioned in the introduction of the story: the Spirit of God, the Son of God and the enemy of God. The Spirit was the Father's representative sent to do spiritual guard duty and to be both instructor and protector. The Son was the representative of man as inhabited by God. He was to demonstrate how God behaves when He is confronted by the enemy. Jesus was to face that enemy in actuality so that He could be tempted in all points as we are, thus making His atoning death on our behalf the literal work of the Lamb of God without spot or blemish, not because He had never been tested of sin, but rather because having been tested, He had never tasted of sin. Thus, He could pay the price for our sins once and for always.

The third participant was the devil. He was and is an actual person with an actual personality. He is a spirit being with access to the throne of God and access to the child of God, only, however, with the permission of God. If you are going to argue that Satan is not real, then you have to take a pair of scissors and cut this entire passage out of your Bible. In doing so, you must deny the very existence of the very enemy Jesus spent His life on earth defying. To argue away the existence of Satan is about as foolish as denying gravity. You can pretend he isn't there, but by doing so, you only make his work that much easier. Oh, that we Christians could

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achieve the balance between ignoring his presence on the one hand and wrongfully fearing his omnipotence on the other.

THE PURPOSE

So those are the participants in the story. Now for the purpose of the story. It is clearly proclaimed in the text. It says that the Spirit of God literally drove the Son of God into the wilderness for one reason: to be tested by the devil. Now note these things about Jesus' temptation.

1- He was filled with the Spirit.

That is, He was totally under the control of the Spirit. He always was, but this is no doubt included in the text to remind us that warfare is not a sign of apostasy, but a sign of maturity. When God's man or woman is under the Spirit's control, he or she is ready to allow the Spirit the freedom to lead them into the storms of life. Those deep troubles you are facing may well be the sign of God's great confidence in you. Here was the Living Son of God, who was without sin, totally under the control of God's Spirit, and what was it that God's Spirit did with Him? He drove Him into the wilderness. Now the word translated "drove" in this passage does not mean "to force against one's will." Jesus was not resisting. It means "to compel, to lead with great energy, to leave no doubt about the direction one should go." Jesus did not wander into the wilderness where Satan happened to be. He was compelled by God's Spirit. In order to obey God's Spirit, there was no place else He could go.

2- Note where He was led, into the wilderness with the wild beasts.

He was led away from all of life's crutches. He was led away from all of life's tangible assistance. He was led away from His family and His friends. He was led away from His study group and His fellowship. He was led away from John the Baptist. He was led away from everyone but His God.

3- Notice the duration: forty days.

This is a seemingly interminable period. He was in the wilderness until every trace of His physical strength was gone. Oh, beloved, I know that test you are undergoing seems to go on and on, but my child, the duration of the test merely bears testimony to the importance of the test.

4– And above all, notice the reason He was there. He was there to be tested by the devil.

Thus, the testing that followed was not coincidental. God had initiated the experience. God had determined the length of the experience, the depth of the experience and the purpose of the experience. Jesus' testing and yours and mine not only did not and does not catch God off guard, but our loving God has tenderly engineered the circumstances. He had allowed the circumstances for the purpose of testing us, even as He did His own Son, so that we may demonstrate, even as Jesus did, the power of God to defeat the enemy. He wanted Jesus to meet the enemy, confront the enemy, and to stand still while He defeated the enemy. His purposes have not changed.

THE PREPARATION

Now we come to the meat of the passage. We read of the only face-to-face, voice-to-voice confrontation between man and Satan in the New Testament. Every word is of paramount significance. Not a syllable is either accidental or incidental. Read it prayerfully. Read it carefully. It is both the pattern and the prescription. It is a full-color, three-dimensional picture of how and when and why Satan confronts those in whom God lives. It is the exact method God still uses in man, when man, confronted by the enemy, lets God be Himself. The story goes on:

Now during those days, He ate nothing. When He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He at length became hungry. So the Tempter, Satan, came to Him and said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." But Jesus answered him saying, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

Satan now proceeds to attack Jesus in waves, just as he did Eve in the garden and just as he did with Job. He never throws the whole book at you at once. He knows you would hurl yourself in a frantic state of inadequacy at the feet of God. That's the last thing he wants. He wants to approach you with just enough of a crisis to make you fear, but not enough of a crisis to make you trust. So he will always beat at the doorpost of your heart in waves, one thrust at a time.

How did Jesus prepare for the battle? He obviously was aware that He was about to have the heavy artillery fired in His direction.

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First of all, He relaxed. He knew He couldn't do it on His own. The Scripture says the Spirit led Him into the wilderness and then concludes that the Spirit led Him while He was in the wilderness. So Jesus relaxed and just let God be God in Him. He knew that the Father had even this situation well under His control.

Secondly, Jesus was at ease with no one around but God. His only companions were the Holy Spirit and the wild beasts that lived in the fields. Jesus, even as a man, had learned the secret of being alone with His Father.

Thirdly, Jesus, confronted with the greatest single test of His life, determined that now was the time to fast and pray. He denied Himself the right to physical food to enable the Spirit to feed Him with the bread of Life. He denied Himself that which would have renewed His strength physically in order to appropriate that which would renew His strength spiritually, knowing all the while, that once sufficiently weakened physically, the enemy would attack. And attack he did.

THE PARTICULARS

Which brings us to the first missile that Satan sent flying into the Savior's life in an attempt to divert Him from His divinely ordained mission.

These truths stand out immediately:

1- Satan will tempt you first at your greatest area of vulnerability.

Jesus had not eaten for forty days. From the Master's perspective, it was to deny the flesh to equip the spirit to withstand the battle. From Satan's perspective, it was the Master's most vulnerable spot. Satan wanted to do two things: remind Jesus of His physical needs and then tempt Jesus to use His spiritual powers to meet those needs.

2- Satan began by questioning who God is. He always does.

You'll notice he did that with Eve as well. He will cause the Christian to question his salvation. He will cause the Christian to question his inheritance as an heir of God and a joint-heir of Christ. He will try to sell you the lie that either God is not who He said He is, or you are not who God said you are, His child. In either case, he almost always raises the question mark rather than confronting you with a direct statement. If he begins by denying Scripture, you'll come up fighting. But if he begins by raising doubts in your

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mind about the Scripture, then you will begin to listen.

“If you are the Son of God,” he began. Now obviously Satan knew, and Satan knew that Jesus knew He was the Son of God, or He could not have even been tempted to do what Satan was suggesting. Only the Son of God could have been tempted by this temptation. You couldn’t and I couldn’t. The temptation to turn rocks into sandwiches has just not been my biggest battle. Since Jesus was God, He could be tempted to misuse the powers of God. Nevertheless, Satan begins with the patented opener, “If”.

3– Satan then tempts the Son of God to misuse His Father’s power.

This is vital. The temptation, in reality, was to take the power of God which was literally at His disposal and use it, not for something bad, but for something which circumvented the spiritual purposes God had in mind. Now, obviously, God performed many physical miracles in the New Testament. But the primary reason He did was to demonstrate spiritual truth. Whenever the miracles themselves became the focus of His ministry, Jesus always rebuked those who had such a limited perspective of His Kingdom. The reason this miracle was so repugnant to Jesus was because it would have met a physical need at the expense of a spiritual one. The battle they were fighting was not physical. It was a battle being waged by principalities and powers in the heavenlies. To deprive man of the revelation God was about to make of His power through the circumstances simply in order to remove the circumstances would have been counter-productive, to be sure.

God is still in the miracle business. But He is God, not us, and He is not at our beck and call to provide physical miracles on demand if those miracles would interrupt the spiritual lessons He is teaching us through the “inconveniences” of life. So beware. It is not always God’s will to make you wealthy. It is not always God’s will to make you successful. It is God’s will to reveal Himself in such a way that both we and the world will know that He is God. Sometimes that is to miraculously give us what we want; but more often than not, it is to give us what we need: more and more and more of Him. Satan has suggested that if He really were God, He ought to at least come up with a loaf of pumpernickel bread out of that slab of stone that was staring Him in the face.

4– Jesus answers, “It is written.”

This is the first of three such statements in this passage. Jesus

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refuses to meet Satan on Satan's terms. He will not stoop to argue either the need or the possibility. He does not pretend not to be hungry, and He does not pretend to be unable to do what Satan is suggesting. He simply does the one thing that Satan cannot tolerate. He quotes the Scripture. He simply recited Deuteronomy 8:3 which, in effect, reminds the enemy of the purposes of God which are spiritual, not physical.

Then Satan hurls missile number two in rapid-fire order. He is not likely to be deterred by one right choice. Usually, just beyond that first right answer, lies an immediate second test. In this case, it sounded like this:

Then the devil took him into the holy city, ³Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, cast yourself down from here; for it is written that *'He will command his angels concerning you, that they guard you...'*, and *'Upon their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'*" And Jesus answering, said to him, ¹⁴"Again, it is written, *'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'*"

The first temptation was to misuse the power of God to solve a real problem. Jesus was hungry. Satan wanted Jesus to go be fed in the flesh at the expense of the spirit. Jesus said, "No." Now Satan comes back with a more sensational suggestion. He says, "Let's prove who God is by putting You on the pinnacle of the temple and having an Evil Kneivel jumping contest. You hurl Yourself down and just see if Your God will use His miraculous powers to deliver You...if You are the Son of God, that is." This temptation highlights several key truths.

a) God does not yield to presumption. Don't put yourself through a violation of basic Scriptural principles into a position where you shouldn't be and then quote Scripture for God to bail you out. Don't steal and then expect God to meet your needs. Don't lie and then ask God to circumvent the consequences. Don't refuse to love your wife and then expect God to supernaturally make your wife love you. God doesn't work that way.

b) Don't use the Scripture out of context to twist God's arm. It didn't work for the devil, and it won't work for us. The Word is not a sequence of syllables to be toyed with so it says what we want. It is a series of principles each of which agrees with the next, which, when used in context, always reveals the mind of God. Be careful how you use the Word.

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c) Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16 and gets to the root of the matter. The root of the matter is that God is not a rabbit that you coax into action by dangling before Him the carrot of presumptuous behavior or misused Scripture. He is above the coaxing of men. He has a plan and He wants man to be brought into harmony with His plan, not for men to trick Him into harmony with theirs. Satan's goal was to use an unnecessary situation to demonstrate unnecessarily how powerful God is. Too many media evangelists today are playing right into his hands. Jesus answered with a straightforward answer. He said, "No."

The third temptation was even more brash and more sensational. That's always the progression. Satan will begin with something quietly believable and work up to something so bizarre that we are tempted to try it just to see if it will work. Here's his offer:

And again the Devil ³led Him up ¹on an exceeding high mountain ³and showed Him in a moment in time ¹all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; And he said to him, "All these things—³all this power and their glory—will I give unto you; for to me has it been delivered and to whomever I will I give it. If therefore you ¹will fall down and make obeisance to *me*, it shall all be yours." Then Jesus answered and said unto him, ¹"Go away, Satan! For it is written, *'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.'*"

Jesus' final temptation was once again a test to misuse the powers of God to gain something physical that would not last. This time Satan offered to Jesus a kingdom short cut. He showed Him all the kingdoms of this world which would one day pass into oblivion and said, in essence, "Here's a kingdom You can have without having to go to that Cross. Here's an easier way. All You have to do is acknowledge that I am the god of this world and therefore the god to be worshipped in this world and you can have it all."

Jesus answered, "Get lost, Satan." He then quoted Deuteronomy 6:13. He said, "Satan, any shortcut to achieving spiritual goals that replaces God's unusual but wonderful ways with those of the world will not suffice. God is not interested in shortcuts. God is not interested in a Cross-less theology. God's kingdom is spiritual, and the King will only be exalted when man is willing to forego that which is physical, if need be, for that which is spiritual to become a reality."

Immediately, these truths emerge:

a) *Satan is the prince of this world.* If he were not, this would

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not have been a temptation. So stop trying to fashion yourself a god out of the clay of circumstances. The god of this world loves to place you in the deserts of life and then offer you stones disguised as bread. He loves to tempt you to test God by refusing to work and then quoting Scripture to say that God should supply all your needs. He loves to offer you things God will not offer you in order to get you to alter your theology just enough to minimize the Cross and maximize the things this world offers.

b) The one thing Satan abhors above all is Lordship. The one thing he cannot tolerate is for a Christian to say, “It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord your God and Him only shall ye serve.” That’s more than he can take. It means you’ll turn down anything this world has to offer if it interferes with what God wants to do to re-fashion you into His likeness. That’s the final test and that’s the final blow. With that, Satan will bow in utter disgust and for a season, he will depart. But only for a season. The passage concludes:

So the Devil, ³having finished every kind of testing, departed from him for a time; ¹and behold, ²the angels ¹came and ministered to him.

It is at this point that we will begin our next study. We will look more closely at the patterns, the parallels, the progression and the principles that emerge from this incredible blow-by-blow account of the greatest cosmic conflict in the history of man. We will delve more fully into why Satan approached the Master when he did. We will walk alongside Jesus and overlay His experience on our own so that we can see how God behaves when the devil throws the book at Him, so that we can see how God will behave when the storms of life unleash their unholy terrors on our worlds, and we are confronted with demonstrating either our response or God’s.

Until then, I want us to leave with three basic thoughts to ponder:

1– Satan is real. He is not some hazy, indistinguishable spirit with no personality or predictable behavior patterns. He is real, and he is really what the Bible says He is: a roaring lion who moves about with a vicious appetite, seeking whom he may devour. Satan is real, and he plays for keeps.

2– Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world. The God who lives in you has been victorious over Satan, is being victorious over Satan, and He will be victorious over Satan once

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and for all not too far from now. Don't be swept into an unhealthy Satan-fear kind of walk with God. Jesus was relaxed and at ease. He knew who the enemy was, but He also knew who His Father was and so He had no cause for alarm.

3- You and I need to more fully grasp the power we possess because we possess the Word of God. Meditate on those three "It is written" phrases this week. Ask God to show you just how powerful His Word really is.

Now I do not know the level of warfare that you are engaged in right now. For some, at least, it may be desperately intense. You may feel that you are under an attack that may be fatal. Not so, beloved. Your God has been there. He has stood eye to eye with the same enemy who is now threatening you and His Word prevailed. He has not changed. His Word has not changed. His plan has not changed. On occasions, our God does lead us into the wilderness to be tested of Satan. But so often it is but a loving Father's way of demonstrating to you, His growing child, the magnificent confidence He has in you. In due time, the enemy will flee, and God will send His angels to wrap their arms of love about you and comfort you. He always has. He always will. Until then, when the warfare gets tough, your God wants to fight for you. Let Him!

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