

“CHOOSING A LIFE THAT MATTERS:
BELIEVE GOD, NOT THE DECEIVER”
Genesis 3:1-7, Colossians 2:6-10, John 7:37-38, 8:42-47
September 22 & 23, 2018

“In his book, *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer tells of his harrowing experience climbing Mt. Everest. On May 10, 1996, Krakauer made it to the top. He paused only for a few minutes before heading down, his muscles exhausted, his limbs frozen, and his brain oxygen-deprived. As he descended, some clouds drifted up and enveloped him. Soon, thunder, lightning, and a snowstorm threatened to disorient him, but he was close enough to base camp number 4 to get to the sheltering tents before the full force of the storm hit.

“Four climbers arrived at the summit shortly before Jon and did not have time to get to the camp before darkness. The storm caused them to lose their way. Exhausted and lost, they simply lay down to wait out the night. When they awoke in the morning, they found they had lain down just one step from the 4,000-foot precipice of the South Wall. They had slept the night on the edge of a cliff in the middle of a snowstorm.

“Our culture can disorient us with the winds of relativism and the darkness of unbelief. Many people are unaware that they sleep on the edge of disaster. The light of the Gospel reveals our position and points the way to safety.”¹ Believing in God makes the difference for us as His Way provides guidance and security as we follow Him and live according to His purpose. Following God’s Word and obeying His guidelines keeps us on the path to choosing a life that matters.

And that is the focus of the sermon today, *Choosing a Life That Matters by Believing in God, Not The Deceiver*. From the very beginning of humanity, a war has been waged against us by Satan. He **does not** want us to have a close relationship with God, because he hates us and wants to destroy us. So he uses any possible trick, lie or deceit to change our minds about God. And the Old Testament account recorded in Genesis 3, tells how Satan caused Eve to question why God would tell them not to

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2003] pg. 268

eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the Garden of Eden. Satan convinced Eve that it was because God was holding out on them, not wanting them to have everything that was possible. Satan's trickery put enough doubt in Eve's mind about God's intentions, even convincing her that she and Adam would become like God if they ate that fruit, that Eve disobeyed God's ONE law to them, and ate the apple, giving some of it to Adam, too.

The Deceiver, Satan, desires our separation from God. He hates us and desires that we all join him in Hell, God's pre-described destination for Satan and his demonic horde. The ultimate goal for Satan is to separate us from our faith in God, whereby our future life for all eternity is then put in peril. So Satan will use whatever lie he can come up with to trick us, misinform us, and convince us that we can live a life without God. He will use his power to make our lives miserable with illness, death, plague, torture and persecution, and even bankruptcy in the attempt to get us to "*curse God and die*" (Job 2:9). And if that doesn't work, he'll turn around and give us our heart's desire, anything we might ever want, so that we become comfortable and believe that we've done **all of this** by ourselves without the help of God. Either in hardship or in abundance, Satan will use whatever he can to lead us away from God and send us off the edge of the precipice of death. That is his ultimate goal – destroy humanity!

We see it throughout the Old and New Testaments of our Bible, how Satan wars against us, trying his best to prevent us from believing in God, whereby we find eternal life. Over and over again, God sends His messengers (prophets, teachers, evangelists) to remind and tell the people of the world that life can only be found as we believe in and trust God through His Messiah, Jesus Christ. And time and time again we hear how some refuse to believe and follow God, and end up falling for the lies of Satan and causing tremendous pain and suffering to the people around them. Satan will **use anyone** to do his best to fulfill his purpose – destroy us.

The battle begins when we establish our relationship with God in faith, trusting in the work of Salvation through Jesus. If we never come to the point of accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, Satan has already won that heart to his side and there is no battle to be fought, because he already has

that person in his control. But as soon as we make a stand for Jesus, it is at that point that we become the enemy of Satan, and he then marks a target on our backs at which to aim all of his fury against us in an attempt to turn us away from God or keep us from growing stronger in our trust of God. Faith in Jesus is the only way in which we can please God, so Satan does his best to keep us away from faith, even trying to destroy what little faith we might have, if he can. Take for example “rock and roll musician Paula Cole, as she laments her loss of faith. She says:

*As a child, I felt what we call God, that spirit, that energy. **Then** you get schooled by society, and I rationalized that it didn't exist. It made me profoundly unhappy that there was no meaning, no logic, no unity of all life.”²*

We can become so deceived by the world that we give up our faith in Jesus Christ, or even in God, and we find our life wasting away, with no purpose. Satan uses whatever it takes to lead us away from God.

But God does not leave us to fight this battle alone. God has provide a way for us to hold on to our faith and grow in our relationship with Him. Paul addresses this in his letter to the Colossians. In our reading today, we hear this encouragement, “*Keep your roots deep in [Christ Jesus], build your lives on Him, and become stronger in your faith, as you were taught. And be filled with thanksgiving*” (2:7). That’s the purpose of the church, to encourage, build up and establish faith in Jesus Christ so that people might keep growing closer to Him and protect themselves from the devastation of deception by Satan.

But how do we do that? Paul continues, saying “*See to it, then, that no one enslaves you by means of the worthless deceit of human wisdom...*” (2:8). OUR wisdom is limited and often fraught with error, but the full truth is found in Jesus Christ, who is “*the radiance of [God’s] glory, the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the Word of His power...*” (Hebrews 1:3). Only Jesus reveals the very nature of God, so we find faith in God as we trust and believe in Jesus Christ.

Yet our “faith faces a double threat, 1) [because] our default tendency is to trust ourselves more than God, and 2) our adversary is out to detour our trust in God through doubts, fears, worries, and

² (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2002] pg. 287)

outright deception.”³ If we’re not careful to protect ourselves by trusting in God and preparing ourselves for this life-long battle, we are prone to become casualties in the war, and trust more in the Deceiver than we trust in God.

However, the Christian who puts their faith in God, and grows in their faith, and submits to the teachings of God’s Word become dangerous warriors in this epic battle. As we put on the whole armor of God that we heard about a couple of weeks ago (Ephesians 6:10-20), using the weaponry that God has provided us to protect ourselves and stay strong in Him, we not only can defend ourselves from the attacks of Satan, but we can defeat him in all of his ploys and deceitful work. **While** Satan tries to snow us in with the storms of life so that we become lost and come to destruction at the cliff of death, our strength comes as we believe in God and develop our faith in Him.

That’s the importance of Jesus’ words to the people in Jerusalem “*on the last and most important day of the festival*” when He said, “*Whoever is thirsty should come to Me and drink. As the Scripture says, ‘Whoever believes in Me, streams of life-giving water will pour out from his heart.’ Jesus said this about the Spirit, which those who believed in Him were going to receive...*” (John 7:37-39).

You see, God supplies us with the power of His Holy Spirit as we put our trust in Jesus. God’s Holy Spirit protects us, guides us, corrects us and instructs us so that our faith in Jesus can grow stronger and we become soldiers of Christ Jesus, ready to rise to conquer the schemes of the Deceiver.

And Jesus aptly describes Satan and exposes his intentions. “*From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he is only doing what is natural to him, because he is a liar and the father of all lies...*” (John 8:44). So nothing we hear from Satan is true. NOTHING! When he **questions** what God has told us as truth, **do not believe him**; do not be persuaded by him to do things that God says “NO!” to.

To do that, we have to continually be ready for any attack. So here are 6 ways that we can grow stronger to be able to fight back against the attacks of Satan, the Deceiver.

³ (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing a Life That Matters*, [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2017] pg. 67)

1) **Be intentional about Bible intake!** The closer we get to knowing God and Jesus, the stronger we will be in the fight. We have to get into the Bible so that the Bible can get into us. As we abide in Christ, He abides in us and gives us the nourishment our spirits need to become strong in Him. If we neglect our connection with Jesus, we will become weak, spiritually atrophied, and susceptible to attack because we do not know God's Word. We must read the Bible, study it, memorize it, talk about it, and listen to sound biblical teaching so that it gets into us. That's why I've given out the challenge to read through the Bible this year. In your bulletins today you have the next reading schedule for October. Take about 20 minutes each day and immerse yourself in the truth of God's Word.

If you haven't taken my challenge but want to begin reading, start with the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Learn the life of Jesus and come to understand His teachings. Memorize key verses that stand out to you and encourage you. Get involved in a Bible study, either here or start your own at home with others. Gather with other believers to glean the power of God's truth for your life. Even explore different translations of the Bible to help you understand it better.

2) **Search, discover, write, and take "Vitamin A" daily.** Let me explain. Dr. Howard Hendricks, a seminary professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, made this great statement. "The Christian community today suffers from a 'Vitamin A' deficiency – Application!" Our faith grows in direct proportion to our understanding of who God is, and what are His ways. But we can know all about God and understand His ways, yet still lack in our faith because we are not applying that truth in our lives. So searching for answers to life's questions, discovering who Jesus is and why He came, and writing our convictions and our reasons for life are essential parts of applying the truth that God has for us.

Just reading the Bible will not help us unless we put it into action within our own lives. Make a lifetime practice of learning more and more about who God is and what He wants us to do with what He has provided for us. Keep track of them so that you can review them and build upon them. And as you do that, those lessons will become ingrained in you so that you will be able to stand strong in the battle before you. Apply what you learn so that it will live in you and through you.

3) **Start a “rock collection.”** In order to help us remember the lessons God provides for us, follow this simple practice that is found throughout the Bible. Whenever there was important spiritual breakthroughs in the lives of God’s people, they would take rocks and make a monument with them in order to remember what God had done or what God had taught. Use the stones to remind you of a failure you learned to trust God through. Mark the stones so that you remember the victories you had when you lived according to God’s word. Make the stone memorials to remember how God answered your prayers and gave you strength in tough times. Create a list of God’s provisions and guidance in your Bible and then use those stones to remind you each day that the Lord God is with you.

4) **Obey God!** As you grow in your faith, it is vital that you begin to grow in your obedience to God’s Word. Obedience matures your faith, and it is essential for real life. German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*:

“Only he who believes is obedient; only he who is obedient believes.”⁴

Obedience and faith are ALWAYS found together because they complement and support each other. One cannot become strong without the other. Obedience is absolutely essential to faith.

Charles Colson explains it this way in his book, *Loving God*; “For maturing faith – faith which deepens and grows as we live our Christian life – is not just knowledge, but knowledge acted upon. It is not just belief, but belief lived out – practiced.” Simple as that!

5) **Read book and mine hearts.** Faith in Jesus Christ is infectious, and yet we have to be surrounded by those who have faith to keep growing in faith. Radical faith grows very rapidly as we rub shoulders with those who live it. There are so many outstanding accounts of people of faith found in our library here. Some are on the book cart in the Gathering Area. Immerse yourself with the way that they handled tough situations because they relied upon God through faith in the midst of it.

And then explore the faith in the lives of those right around you. There are many accounts of people right here in this church who trusted in God with their own lives and have been used in

⁴ (Dennis Rainey, *Choosing a Life That Matters*, [Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2017] pg. 75)

remarkable ways to encourage and build into the lives of others. Stories of the faithfulness of God! Accounts of His grace and provision! Recollections of God's love to us made manifest in their lives in order to equip and encourage others. Surround yourselves with the lives of the faithful and learn from them.

This summer I read Eric Metaxas' book, *7 Men and the Secret of Their Greatness*. In it he highlights seven men whose lives made significant impact on their times - George Washington, William Wilberforce, Eric Liddell, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jackie Robinson, John Paul II, and Charles Colson. Each one lived their faith in magnificent ways to lead nations toward faith. Eric also has the book, *7 Women*, and does the same thing with women of faith who have changed the face of our world in their time. Books like these highlight how God works in the lives of people as they obediently live for Him to transform the world.

Finally 6) **Evict unwelcome houseguests.** This is the key to the whole message today. Unbelief has always plagued humanity and it is Satan's #1 strategy to dissolve our faith. With one question, "Has God said?" he implants doubt and disbelief into our hearts and minds so as to dislodge our faith and cripple our growth. Since Satan wants to destroy us, he uses this one question to dismantle any hope that we have in God touching our lives and using us in vital ways. We have to get rid of unbelief and trust the God Who Is, and Was, and Who Is to Come.

Remember, Satan is a liar, the father of all lies, so whatever he says distorts the truth and tries to mislead and corrupt and eliminate all faith within us. We must rid ourselves of these ploys of Satan by surrounding ourselves with strong, faithful brothers and sisters who are not afraid to live boldly in God's Way. Do not be afraid of letting go those who take you down dark paths and get you to believe the deception that Satan puts out as truth. Be willing to stand alone, if necessary, to protect yourself from the lies and deceit that Satan would have you believe. Listen again to Paul's words of Jesus in Colossians 2:9, "*For the full content of divine nature lives **in Christ**, in His humanity, and you have been given full life **in union with Him**. He is supreme over every spiritual ruler and authority.*"

Only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. Believe in Him and not the father of lies. Follow Him, not the Deceiver! Trust in the Lord our God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength; to the glory of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN.