

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL (20)
THE BATTLE TO DO GOD'S WILL – Part Two
“SET FREE OR HELD CAPTIVE?”
Sermon 11/11/18

Last week we looked at the battle we all face when we strive to do God's will. Our fleshly desires constantly battle against the Spirit within us in an attempt to prevent us from doing the will of God. We looked at Jeremiah and the leaders who came to him for advice. They stated they would do whatever the Lord told them to do but they were not being truthful. They had no intention of doing anything other than what they had already decided to do. God told them to stay in the land of Judah but they rejected the word of the Lord, gathered the people left in the land, including Jeremiah and his companion Baruch, and left for Egypt.

Today I want to go back to Jeremiah and show that we not only battle our own fleshly desires but we also battle against the devil who deceives us into believing things to be true which in reality are not. Satan had planted a deceptive lie within the people of Judah and as a result it became very difficult for them to resist the will of the devil and do the will of the Lord. Even in Egypt Jeremiah continued to warn the people of Judah to stop sinning by burning incense to other gods. He told them their sin had caused the Lord to set His face against them and as a result they would die by the sword, famine and pestilence. You'd think they would have some concern about this coming true and seek to repent. But such was not the case. Ever resisting the word of the Lord this was their response to the warnings of Jeremiah.

JEREMIAH 44:16-17

'As for the message that you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we are not going to listen to you! But rather we will certainly carry out every word that has proceeded from our mouths, by burning incense to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, just as we ourselves, our forefathers, our kings and our princes did in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem.

They have just declared they will not heed the words of Jeremiah. They will continue to do whatever they want to do. Now listen to the reason for their rebellion.

JEREMIAH 44:18

“For then [in the land of Judah] we had plenty of food and were well off and saw no misfortune. But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine.”

In their minds the disaster that had come upon them in Judah through the invasion of Babylon was because they had stopped sacrificing to their idols for a season, most likely not because they had a change of heart but rather due to the lack of food while they were under a siege from the Babylonian army. This siege lasted between 1½ years to a little over three years. They refused to acknowledge that their destruction came upon them because of their refusal to forsake their idols and return to the Lord. Here is how Jeremiah replied to their outrageous claim.

JEREMIAH 44:20-23

“As for the smoking sacrifices that you burned in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your forefathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, did not the Lord remember them and did not all this come into His mind? So the Lord was no longer able to endure it, because of the evil of your deeds, because of the abominations which you have committed. Thus your land has become a ruin, an object of horror and a curse, without an inhabitant, as it is this day. Because you have burned sacrifices and have sinned against the Lord and not obeyed the voice of the Lord or walked in His law, His statutes or His testimonies, therefore this calamity has befallen you, as it has this day.”

Jeremiah tells them they were mistaken. It was not their sacrifices to the queen of heaven but rather the compassion of the Lord and His desire for their repentance that kept them alive for so many years before their destruction came. Even though their promised destruction did not come for over 40 years it did eventually come.

Peter speaks of this in the New Testament when he says, *“The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance”* (2 Peter 3:9). God did not desire the destruction of Judah or Jerusalem. He desired his people to repent in order to avoid destruction. So He was patient with them, continually calling to them over 40 years to repent while also warning them of their destruction if they did not.

These people had forsaken the Lord and had lost all sense of understanding of how they got themselves into their predicament. They believed their continued worship of the queen of heaven was the reason why they lived safely within their walled cities. They did not equate God’s patience with their safety.

They also did not believe God was responsible for the disaster that came upon them. They believed their lack of worshipping the queen of heaven for a period of time during the siege was responsible for their land being destroyed and for their lack of food. They did not (or could not) connect the dots between their worship of idols and the Lord’s warning over the course of 4 decades that He was about to bring destruction upon them unless they repented. In their minds their fate had nothing to do with the Lord. The Scriptures say, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding”* (Proverbs 9:10). That certainly holds true here. These people had forsaken the fear of the Lord and had lost all wisdom and understanding of His ways.

And yet sometimes a lack of wisdom and understanding is simply a product of deception; for surely these people were deceived into thinking their idols had the power to prevent their destruction and that the Lord had nothing to do with it. What this shows is that in some areas of our lives, no matter how many times we hear the word of the Lord, we still fail to grasp the truth of it. We continue to cling to what we believe is truth when in reality it is falsehood. Like the people of Judah we believe with all our hearts that this falsehood is our truth when in reality we have been deceived.

Deception is not a new thing. Deception is found in the very first chapters of the book of Genesis. In Genesis chapter 3 we read this:

GENESIS 3:1-7

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God has made. And he said to the woman, ‘Indeed, has God said, “You shall not eat from any tree of the garden”?’ The woman said to the serpent, ‘From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.”’”

“The serpent said to the woman, ‘You surely will not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make one wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate.”

As we can see from Genesis, mankind has been susceptible to the deception of Satan from the very beginning of time. Even Eve admitted that she had been deceived by the serpent (Genesis 3:13). But Satan’s deception actually started in heaven when he gathered together a third of heavens angels and convinced them they could remove God from His throne and replace Him with Satan. As a result, God threw Satan and his followers out of heaven and cast them down to the earth where Satan began his deceitful reign over mankind (Revelation 12:7-9). Thus began the choice for all men to choose whom they would serve. Would they serve the God of truth or would they serve the great deceiver?

Satan has continued his deception through the ages. In fact, the Bible tells us that in the future, Satan will successfully deceive the nations in order to gather them together for the final war against Christ and His church. It is during this final battle that Satan will forever be defeated and as punishment will be thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:7-10).

Satan’s purpose in rebelling against God is that He wanted to be like God. He wanted to rule over others. And so he continues his attempts to rule over the earth by acting within his limited authority and issuing directives for men to follow. These go against everything that God desires for his children but, like Adam and Eve, we sometimes fall prey to his schemes.

In 2 Timothy Paul speaks of what we as believers in Christ should do to show that we have been set free from sin. But he also speaks of those who are held in what he calls the “snare of the devil”.

2 TIMOTHY 2:24-26

“The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness, correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.”

Notice Paul does not say we are being freed from the captor, but rather the device the captor used to ensnare us. Just as a rabbit needs to be freed from the trap that ensnared it, we need to be freed from the snare that holds us captive. When we come upon the trapped rabbit we do not

go looking for the hunter in order to free the rabbit. The hunter is responsible for setting the trap but it is the trap and not the hunter which prevents the rabbit from escaping. So it is with the devil. The devil uses a snare to hold us captive but it is the snare itself and not the devil that is preventing our escape. Once we are freed from his snare the devil can no longer hold us captive to do his will.

The process of being freed from the snare of the devil involves the knowledge of the truth. Jesus said: *“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32-NLT). Knowing the truth, having truth revealed, is what sets people free from the snare of the devil which holds them captive. The snare the devil uses is deceit. He parades around like an angel of light but he is full of darkness and duplicity (2 Corinthians 11:13-14). Only truth can spring the trap and set us free.

Therefore it is vital that we know what real truth is. Not the “whatever feels true to you” nonsense of today; but real truth; God’s unchanging, unshakeable truth. God’s truth allows us to escape the snare of deceptive lies planted within us by the devil. Once we know this truth we are freed from the trap the devil uses to hold us captive to do his will.

This is an important concept because Peter tells us that the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour (1 Peter 5:8). Satan distorted the word of God when he tempted Eve to sin. He attempted to do the same with Jesus by tempting Him in the wilderness for 40 days. Though he was unsuccessful in his initial attempts the devil was not through with Jesus. The Scriptures say, *“When the devil had finished every temptation, he left Him until an opportune time”* (Luke 4:13). If the devil would not leave Jesus alone he certainly will not leave us alone. He will find those “opportune times” to pervert the word of God and deceive us into believing his lies to prevent us from experiencing the fullness of life promised to us in God’s word.

I used to work as a teller for Bank of America and I dealt with thousands of dollars of cash each work day. As part of my training I had to be able to recognize a counterfeit bill when I saw one. Instead of having me memorize dozens of counterfeit bills they had collected over the years, the bank only showed me the real ones. I got to know the look and feel of a real Treasury bill in each denomination. The bank was convinced that if I knew what a real bill looked like I would be able to spot any number of counterfeits. I found this to be true during the years I worked as a teller. As long as I knew what the true Treasury bill looked like I could easily spot a counterfeit.

This same principle holds true in the spiritual world. Prior to coming to faith in Christ we were held captive by lies concerning the word of God and the deity of Christ as well as what we held true about ourselves and others. Once our eyes were opened to the truth of the Gospel we were able to discern the counterfeit, deceptive truth from the absolute truth which then set us free from the captivity of disbelief.

The work of discerning real from counterfeit truth did not end at our conversion. It continues as we journey through life. Although we have come to an understanding of real truth we can still succumb to falsehoods. Just as Satan deceived Eve (Genesis 3:1-13) we too are subject to deception by believing things that have the appearance of truth but in reality are cleverly disguised lies and half-truths meant to lead us away from the path of life.

As long as we inhabit this body of flesh we remain vulnerable to the deception of Satan. The snare the devil uses to hold us captive to do his will is composed of lies and deceptions. The reason they hold us captive is because we believe those lies to be true. Satan deceives us into believing something which feels true to us but is actually not. It is a pretense built upon a lie.

God's truth sets us free but Satan's lies imprison us, keeping us locked away from the fullness of life which God desires us to have (John 10:10). The problem comes when we are deceived into believing these lies to be true when in fact they are not. Freedom comes from uncovering these deceptions and exposing them to the light of truth. When what we once believed to be true is exposed as a lie we are then set free from these deceptions. The truth of Jesus is the key that brings life back into struggling souls.

Some thoughts breathe life-giving energy into our hopes and dreams. Others seem to drain the very life out of us. We want to ensure that whatever drives our behavior is stemming from thoughts that are truthful and life-giving rather than those which rob us of life. According to 2 Timothy repentance leads us to a knowledge of the truth which then allows us to come to our senses and escape the snare of the devil. The reason the people of Judah remained captive to Satan's will was because they refused to repent.

All of us prior to coming to faith in Christ were also held captive by the devil to do his will. I say this because the Scripture says the devil blinds the minds of all who do not believe (2 Corinthians 4:3-4). We were all blind to the truth of the gospel at one time and unwittingly disobeyed the will of the Lord. It was our exposure to the truth of the gospel and our repentance for what we had done, that allowed us to experience the freedom for which Christ died (Galatians 5:1). The moment we acknowledged the truth of who Christ was and what He had accomplished for us was the moment God opened our prison doors and released us from the snare of unbelief planted by the devil to hold us captive.

Planting lies within the human heart is as old as Adam and Eve. In the beginning Satan distorted the word of God in order to deceive Eve (and Adam who was with her) into eating of the fruit which God had expressly forbidden. As Satan smooth talked them into believing his lie they became more and more convinced that what he said was true. But it was not until they made the final decision to believe Satan that they became fully ensnared in his deceit. The lie that Satan proclaimed and they accepted as truth - that the word of God could not be trusted - resulted in Adam and Eve's disobedience to God's explicit command; and they suffered the consequences of believing this lie throughout the rest of their lives.

The devil has whispered many lies to us in our journey through life beginning in childhood; some of these we have rejected while others we have believed. These false truths are those which keep us ensnared in his web of deceit. When we allow the Lord to expose as lies what we believe to be true, we will find release from captivity and escape from the snare of the devil.

For the devil is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44); nothing he says can be trusted. He takes advantage of every opportunity to plant either untruth or perverted truth within our hearts to keep us from experiencing the freedom that Christ offers (Genesis 3:1-7). Satan is an expert at planting his lies deep within the raw emotions of our most vulnerable moments. When we are at

our weakest we are most susceptible to his lies.

As believers we have the Holy Spirit living within us who helps us to discern the true from the false. He gives us the power to resist the lies of the devil (James 4:7). The problem comes not from resisting but embracing. When we embrace rather than challenge these lies as Jesus did (Matthew 4:1-11) we trip the devil's snare and become captive to his lies. These lies will follow us throughout our lives unless and until Jesus sets us free (John 8:32; 17:17). Here are some examples.

I have known people who have carried the weight of sin for years after becoming a Christian because they believed something about themselves which was contradictory to the word of God. Although they have confessed their sin they cannot seem to move beyond the strong negative emotions connected to it. They believe God can and does forgive sin but at the same time they do not believe God could ever truly forgive them. They are convinced they are God's exception; that their sin is too awful and God's mercy is too small.

I have also known people who remain captive to the shame of their past either from something they have done or something done to them. Shame remains a deep part of their self-identity causing them to remain captive to the negative events of their lives. These people are convinced that what they did or what was done to them is too great for the blood of Jesus to cleanse. They find it very difficult to move beyond their shame because they do not believe God's mercy could possibly cover that much shame.

Of course these lies fly in the face of Scripture which says the exact opposite. But their disbelief is deeply rooted in the negative emotions of their past. Satan has taken the opportunity to plant lies which constantly tell them they are unworthy of forgiveness or that their shame could never be removed. These lies feel more true to them than Scripture. Although these negative emotions could have been resolved in the past they have instead been dragged like a dead weight into the future. The snare of the Devil resides deep within these negative emotions keeping the lies alive and active. In order to be released from the Devil's snare these lies must be presented to God so His truth can set them free. That is the crux of healing and the key to living in the light of God's word.

I can relate to these people for we have all believed lies in our lifetimes. Yours may be different from mine but we have all fallen victim to the deceptive lies of Satan. I once had a very hard time believing God loved me. I had done things which I was very much ashamed of and continued to carry that shame after accepting Christ into my life. I understood God loved me but it was an intellectual understanding. It could not penetrate my heart because my heart had put up a barrier which said God could never forgive or remove the depth of sin which I had done. I was of two minds. I believed that God loved me but I also believed He could not forgive me for certain sins. I fell into the snare of the devil when I believed something that was contrary to the word of God.

One day, however, God revealed to me that what I had believed about His limited forgiveness was indeed false. Like Eve I had been deceived into believing a lie. When my eyes were opened to see the real truth and the depth of God's unconditional love for me I finally

understood that all sin, including all of mine, was covered by the blood of Jesus. That's when the snare which the devil had set and I had walked into suddenly sprung open and the light of God's true love flooded my soul. Set free from the devils snare I began to see the overwhelming and all-encompassing fullness of God's love. Since then I have been careful not to fall into this same trap again. Since I now know the truth of God's love I can more easily spot the counterfeit deceptive lie when it attempts to recapture me.

The point of today's sermon is this: though we have been studying God's will in an attempt to follow it, we should also be aware that Satan desires us to do his will as well. He is actively setting snares and baiting them with false truths in an effort to capture us to do His will. We cannot remain ignorant of his schemes. We must actively fight against him by immersing ourselves in the truth of God's word. We must know what the real looks, sounds, and feels like so that we can more easily recognize the false when it presents itself. Only then can we avoid the snare of the devil and remain free to do the will of God.

I want to close with this Scripture which is a directive of God intended to help us win our battle against Satan.

EPHESIANS 6:10-17

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

“Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; And in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

We are in a battle, fighting against the schemes of the devil. Truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, and the word of God are the tools of war we have been given in order to win the battle. We are God's instruments but the battle belongs to the Lord. It is in Him alone that we will find our victory.

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