

Diversions And Distractions
Luke 13:31-33

Here in these precious words of scripture that we will study today, our Lord speaks to us about another of those occasions when the inhabitants of the "spirit realm" involve themselves with the things that are taking place over here in our natural realm.

And while I'm aware that there are some people who prefer not to delve into matters such as these, about demons and their involvement in the matter of our natural world, I really must remain committed to simply following along with the scriptures, moving from one verse to the next. And I am compelled to address each of our Lord's truths as they're given to us.

And in doing that, today we have arrived in Luke chapter 13, verses 31 to 33. And in these words, the Lord Jesus doesn't hesitate as He speaks about the involvement of demons who are working their wiles over here in our natural world.

Read along with me beginning in verse 31 of Luke chapter 13.

³¹On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, (to Jesus) "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You."

³²And He said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.'³³ Nevertheless I must journey today, tomorrow, and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem. (Luke 13:31-33)

I'm continually reminded by the words of this gospel that as Jesus walked among the people and ministered to them, He always knew everything about them, their thoughts, their motives and the intents of their hearts, their plans and their purposes. There was nothing hidden from the all-knowing gaze of His Holy Spirit.

As those words in Hebrews chapter 4 remind us,

¹³Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13)

And Jesus not only knew the thoughts of the people He encountered, He also knew everything that was taking place in the realms of the Spirit world around Him, that invisible realm where demons roam about and ply their demonic efforts. He knew as He journeyed towards Jerusalem and towards the cross, that satan was at work at every turn, seeking to discourage, to distract and to divert Him from His appointed purpose. And Jesus took all those things into consideration as He heard these words from these Pharisees seeking to distract Him and to divert Him from His ministry as He journeyed towards Jerusalem.

I can't help but imagine the difficult quandary that satan must have been in at that time, wanting desperately to destroy this one that he despised so much, this King of Glory, whom he had come to usurp. But yet, somehow also knowing that his own misdeeds might actually help Jesus to accomplish the very thing that he, satan, was trying to prevent, the salvation of lost souls.

But satan, the "crafty one", the one that God described in the Book of Genesis by saying "Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made."

This serpent, this crafty one with all of his craftiness, was not, and is not, really as smart as he, and we, often credit him with being. Notice in those words, that God only said that satan was "more crafty" than the beasts of the fields. That ought to tell us something. Though you and I must never underestimate satan, we can trust that he is not really that much more intelligent than we are. Yes, far more crafty, in an evil way, but really not much smarter than us.

Why is knowing that important for us? It is because we need to be confident in God's plan and in His intentions for us, mankind, the "apple of His eye". While yes, for a while, in some ways, we are a little "lower than the angels", we need to remember that God has created man in His image. And in Christ, we become true sons of God. And as sons, our intellect far exceeds that of mere demons! So again, yes demons are more crafty, but only more crafty, not necessarily smarter.

And that should give us encouragement as we contend each day within the spiritual warfare that surrounds us and continually tries to divert us from those plans that God has for us.

Let me repeat some of these words again because we really do need to understand. Yes, satan is crafty, and yes most often, far more crafty than we are. But satan's mind does not compare to the omniscient mind of Christ, the one who created him. And as you and I live and move and have our being in Christ, we will have the mind of Christ in us. And as we abide in Christ, satan cannot compare even to you and me. God's Spirit in us will renew and train up our minds to think and know things that Jesus knows. And by doing that, He can enable our minds to recognize and avoid the crafty ways of satan.

But why am I talking about satan at this point in this study? How does he figure into this passage of scripture today?

It's because satan is actually at the center of it. The craftiness of satan is the word picture that Jesus calls to mind when He refers to the "fox" and to demons. Listen!

³¹On that very day some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You."

³²And He (the Lord Jesus) said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.'" (Luke 13:31-32)

Folks, we dare not walk this journey of daily life unaware of the real dangers that lurk within it. We seem to most often stay naively consumed with the mundane diversions that are taking place up here on the surface, completely unaware that under the surface, hidden within those mundane diversions, there are many other far more serious diversions being spawned by satan and his demons.

In speaking about a "fox", yes, Jesus was speaking about Herod. But He was also taking into account all the "crafty" demons that are hidden within the framework of evil, from these Pharisees, to Herod the king, and especially to satan, the prince of all craftiness who might well have been controlling Herod's mind at the time.

Some bible scholars have thought that these Pharisees who were giving Jesus this warning might possibly have had good intentions, but other scholars think not, that most likely, they were simply playing their part as "messengers of evil", participating in a conspiracy to divert Jesus from His mission of bringing salvation to the people.

When Jesus speaks in other places in these scriptures about the Scribes and Pharisees being a “brood of vipers” it should not escape our understanding. Those snakes were sons of their father, the original snake, that serpent of old, satan.

And as we will clearly see later, during Jesus’ trials and His crucifixion, the Scribes and the Pharisees and their chief priests were direct instruments of satan. And so was Herod!

When we read words like those in Romans chapter 8 that tell us that the “mind controlled by the flesh” is incapable of doing anything good and right, we need to understand that such a mind is easily susceptible to the wiles of satan.

And so it’s understandable how the original “fox” could easily gain control over men’s minds and spawn other “foxes” like Herod and the Pharisees to do his evil bidding.

But thankfully, Jesus was fully aware of all their plans and purposes and crafty intents. And He was ready to deal with their evil deeds exactly as He should.

But consider also, what if these Pharisees were sincere? What if they had given their hearts to Christ and only wanted the best for Him? What if they were simply like Peter, Jesus’ closest friend who naively tried to talk Jesus out of being crucified?

Remember those words that Jesus spoke to Peter during that conversation. He said, “Get thee behind me satan”.

Folks, the crafty one, the “fox” is ever and always involved and he is able to get control over most any person’s voice. And we need to always routinely assume that that might be taking place. Why? It is because that is who satan and his demonic companions are. They are predators, always plying their crafty efforts to try to divert Jesus from His appointed purposes.

But how does that work when they are using their craftiness on us? It’s simply this. As Christians, Jesus lives within you and me. And He has a plan and a purpose that is being carried out through you and me. So, by distracting, discouraging and diverting our purposes and our pathway, he accomplishes his crafty intention of preventing the work of Jesus from going forward.

Here, satan was working on several fronts. He was managing to get control over the minds and hearts of the Pharisees, and then, through them, attempting to keep Jesus from continuing to minister to the lost souls there in Galilee.

And, no doubt, satan is attempting the same kinds of crafty manipulations with you and me each and every day, attempting to divert Jesus away from the appointed path He has designed within you and me and with the people that we might minister to.

How important is that? Folks, it is important beyond any measure that you and I could imagine. Consider the words of Jesus to His disciples in John chapter 14. He said,

¹²“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. ¹³And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.(John 14:12-14)

Folks, these words are speaking about you and me carrying forward the saving and discipling work of the Lord Jesus. And this is what satan desperately wants to prevent as he goes about his crafty and foxy ways in the matters of your and my daily life, to keep us from carrying on forward the plans and the purposes of God.

And it seems that we can so easily be distracted and diverted away from those plans that God has for us. One of those ways that I see taking place and is so very prevalent in our current day is such a simple one. And we don't even need to leave our house to experience it. It involves our televisions and our internet access. Coming from those sources is a daily onslaught by the media, “talking heads” telling us about how the political leaders are leading us astray, trying to convince us that they know the way our political systems should be fixed, consuming our minds with their ideas and philosophies.

I have some dear friends and relatives who are mesmerized as they listen to hours of ongoing conspiracy theories each day, leaving very little time in their daily schedule for learning about and trusting our Lord for the problems of our day.

But also for those of us who are not consumed with politics and conspiracy theories, satan and his minions have plans that seem to work with us as well.

For us, satan's diversions need not be dramatic or threatening events. Most of the time his methods can be simple and involve the more common matters of daily life, matters like those of misguided work responsibilities, or even just an invitation to go to the movies, or out to dinner, busyness that keeps us from doing that other special thing that God would have us to do.

Can't you just imagine the voice of one of the evil ones saying in the back of your mind, "Oh, you can do that later!"

These thoughts remind me of an episode in the Book, *Screwtape Letters*, written by C. S. Lewis. There, the more experienced demon, Screwtape, is giving advice to an apprentice demon, Wormwood, about what to do when Wormwood's "patient" would involve himself in a long period of prayer. Screwtape advised Wormwood that he didn't need to do anything dramatic, but rather to just suggest to his "patient" that he was hungry and then remind him of that tasty snack in the refrigerator.

And folks, it really is often just that simple for us, for you and me. We can easily be detoured away from doing the "better things" of the Lord with some of the simplest and mundane of diversions and distractions.

But may I also go back and repeat something that I said a moment ago. That just as effective as diversions and distractions may be, is the intentional decision that many of even the most devout of believing Christians make to try to minimize the involvements and the impact that the demonic world has on us each day.

I've had Christian friends make comments like, "well, I just don't believe that there is a demon behind every bush. I'm sinful enough on my own, I don't need demons to influence me."

And I've even heard the word "boogieman" mentioned. I must confess to you that I fear for those dear ones!

I have only to read the words given to us in Ephesians chapter 6 to be reminded of the real truth about the demonic world and about their involvements within

our daily lives. Listen to the warning given there in the Book of Ephesians. There the Lord tells us,

¹⁰ . . . be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:10-12)

Oh dear Christian, do you not hear these words from our Lord. When it is the face of a person in front of us, saying words to distract and to discourage us, perhaps a friend, or a neighbor, even a stranger. We really do need to remember that sometimes, perhaps often, it is not that person that is saying and doing the things that are taking place, but rather it is as these scriptures are telling us. It is "the rulers, the authorities, the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil" that are at work.

Here in our scripture passage, Jesus knew very well who He had in front of Him when,

³¹ . . . some Pharisees came, saying to Him, "Get out and depart from here, for Herod wants to kill You."

³²And Jesus said to them, "Go, tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.'" (Luke 13:31-32)

Folks, we dare not be naïve about many of the seemingly common matters that come about within our daily lives. We need to be very careful. Sometimes the activity of the evil ones seem so insignificant. But if our attention gets distracted or the plans that God intends for us get diverted, satan's crafty tricks have succeeded and God's plans get put on the shelf.

Again, many very devoted Christians do not want to think about such things as crafty, foxy, demonic involvements. But please know that Jesus gave full attention to them.

And folks, also some of the most prominent of our Christian heroes of the faith did not shy away from warning us about the activities of the demonic world. One of my favorite heroes of the faith, Martin Luther wrote a Hymn about it, "A Mighty Fortress is our God". In that hymn, Luther reminds us that "satan's craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate".

May we take a few moments and consider this hymn that we sing so often? And as you consider these words, may I ask if you really take those words seriously as you sing them?

Listen to some of the words of that hymn. . .

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
for still our ancient foe
doth seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right man on our side,
the man of God's own choosing.
Dost ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is He;
Lord Sabaoth, His name,
from age to age the same,
and He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The Prince of Darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo, his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

Aren't those such revealing truths to our distracted souls!

Folks, as it was with the Lord Jesus, and as it was with Martin Luther, and now as it is with you and me, there is a daily onslaught of crafty diversions and distractions coming at us by the evil ones, ever and always trying to keep us diverted and distracted from our carrying forward the saving truths of Christ.

And again, why would satan be so intent upon stopping someone so meager and insignificant as you and me? It's because we are not meager or insignificant. Those words of Jesus in John 14 really are true. Listen to them again!

¹²"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. ¹³And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.(John 14:12-13)

Folks, as we said a moment ago, in these words the Lord Jesus is speaking about you and me, here and now. And satan is intent on stopping the voice and the works of the Lord Jesus that are taking place in and through you and me.

And yes, satan's craft and power are great, and he is armed with cruel hate. But as Jesus reassures us and as Martin Luther tells us, we really must not fear, nor be turned aside. We have the very Son of God on our side and satan is no equal for Him.

As we close for today, let me admonish each of us to look very carefully at the distractions that come our way each day. And let's ask God to open our spiritual eyes that we might see the "foxes" that prowl within those distractions trying to keep us from the path that Jesus wants us to travel.

We simply need to gird ourselves about with the Spirit of Christ, not allowing ourselves to be distracted by the wiles of that crafty old fox, satan. We need to lay aside our predispositions to politics and conspiracy theories, turning off those voices that so easily distract and divert our thoughts and behaviors, freeing up our minds and spirits so that we can hear the voice of our Lord as He guides us. And then we need to get on about the work that has been assigned to us.

I'll close with some of those words again from that old hymn. Listen!

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,

we will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.

Let's pray.