

In our search for meaning in a world that includes pain and suffering, we must understand that there is an opponent<sup>1</sup> – a strong adversary that has temporary rule over this world<sup>2</sup>. This enemy does all he can to block us from being able to see the true glory of God, as though putting heavy rocks (burdens) in our pack and eroding or blocking the path that we travel so that we might stumble<sup>3</sup>. Paul talked about a very personal attack by Satan in the form of a “thorn in the flesh.”<sup>4</sup> Satan works constantly to separate us from our relationship with God<sup>5</sup>.

This is why we must realize that life is a battle, and we need strength and strategy from a much higher power to shield us. We need an advocate that is capable of protecting us, winning the battle over our souls, and indeed, over the entire creation<sup>6</sup>.

We need to remind ourselves about the mission that Christ's disciples were given. That mission is to follow in His steps, and that means that we are to contribute to that mission. We know that His mission was to save us from our sins, and to spread the gospel<sup>7</sup> to the nations. A critical part of that mission involves the defeat of Satan; not just at the temptations<sup>8</sup> (after which He immediately began His ministry), but especially in the apparently final episode where Jesus was crucified<sup>9</sup>. His mission, in part, was to destroy the devil's work<sup>10</sup> by breaking his power over death<sup>11</sup>. This was demonstrated conclusively in the resurrection of Christ on the third day.

Jesus passed on this mission to us, as seen His “Great Commission”<sup>12</sup>. He had sent His disciples into the world in a couple of instances to pursue His mission: the apostles<sup>13</sup>, and then a much larger group<sup>14</sup>. The night of the Last Supper, He prayed “As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world,” clearly passing on the mission to his disciples (first to the Twelve, and then to us). He later told Paul on the road to Damascus that He was sending him to Jews and Gentiles to preach the gospel<sup>15</sup>. And to aid in our pursuit of this mission, we know that we will struggle against the powers of darkness<sup>16</sup>.

In the stories of the Second Swordsman, I wrote about an unnamed “hooded figure” that represented Satan or one of his angels. Somehow, I wanted this character to be generic – not very specific yet with an aura of evil. In reality, our adversary is not always well defined, and not always obvious in his attacks on us. The hood prevents us from realizing his personality, and the extent of the darkness that “fills” his heart<sup>17</sup>. He can take on different forms depending on how he calculates our response to him or his minions – from roaring lion<sup>18</sup> to angel of light<sup>19</sup>. The figure is hooded to keep us from seeing it either way. We must not be “unaware of his schemes<sup>20</sup>.” We know that “God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform<sup>21</sup>”, but we could also say that Satan works in mysterious ways to perform his evil rebellion.

Have you ever met such a direct representative of Satan<sup>22</sup>? Think past Adam and Eve's direct confrontation to Satan's accusation of Job's faith. I'm sure he similarly was constantly putting down God's people, with words like, “I told you that this would not work! These people will never be your people!” And then remember the word of Christ, where He told Peter that Satan had asked to harm the disciples<sup>23</sup>, likely in a similar manner as he had done to Job.

God promises to defend us, and provides a full set of armor<sup>24</sup> to enable us to withstand Satan's attacks. The ultimate victory will be God's who created all things and is in ultimate control! Christ will hand over the kingdom to God after he has destroyed Satan's dominion<sup>25</sup>. We are told that “The last enemy to be destroyed is death”<sup>26</sup>. Until then, we must pursue the mission with all of our heart.

1. From the very beginning of the story of man, he has encountered an adversary; see Genesis 3; also the connection between the serpent and Satan in Revelation 12:9: “The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.”

2. “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.” Ephesians 2:1-2

3. The Pharisees added burdens, as Jesus said, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.” Luke 11:46

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us...” Hebrews 12:1

But we have this: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30

4. "... Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me." 2 Corinthians 12:7
5. It is the image of God reflected in you that so enrages hell; it is this at which the demons hurl their mightiest weapons. – William Gurnall; Eldredge, John. *Waking the Dead: The Glory of a Heart Fully Alive* (p. 147). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.
7. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free ... Luke 4:18s
8. One of the records concerning the temptations is Matthew 4:1-17
9. "But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere." 2 Corinthians 2:14
10. "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." 1 John 3:8b
11. "... by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Hebrews 2:14b-15
12. Matthew 28:16-20
13. the "Twelve": Matthew 10:5, Luke 9:1-3
14. the seventy-two, Luke 10:1
15. "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." Acts 26:17b-18
16. "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 6:12
17. It takes a bit of imagination to think of how darkness (the absence of light) can fill something.
18. "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8
19. "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light." 2 Corinthians 11:14
20. "... in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." 2 Corinthians 2:11
22. Robert Louis Stevenson somewhere says, "You know the Caledonian Railway Station in Princes Street, Edinburgh? One day I met Satan there." No one knows what experience Stevenson had but everyone who has any experience of life knows what he means. There are times when an evil power seems to assault us and seek to draw us away from God. And Jesus Said, William Barclay, p. 43
23. Luke 22:31-32; "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." - "Satan has asked for you"; imagine the terror!; think about Jesus peering into the darkness of our hearts; The Teacher may have seen horror as he looks into our heart; but it turns into love, as He did with Peter
24. "Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." Ephesians 6:11 and following verses
25. "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" Colossians 1:13  
"... far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." Ephesians 1:21
26. "Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power." 1 Corinthians 15:24 and context for the portion quoted above