

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

March 29, 1998

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8-11

Sermon: *Not Hearing the Siren's Song*

One of the marks of growing up is to know the dangers of life and how to avoid them, so when you were a small child your parents turned to you and said, "Don't put that in your mouth, you may try to swallow it," "Don't touch that, it is hot," "Get down from there, you may fall." Most of us are able to handle those small directions on how to make it through the dangers of life. When we get a little older and the dangers become things we cannot see, then it seems that we have more difficulty. For example, we have understood that alcohol has been a problem in society. When you take alcohol and combine it with modern means of transportation, you can have chaos. But some people have a great deal of trouble understanding you can't drink and drive a car or steer a boat or fly an airplane. Therefore, disaster comes to them. We have always understood that we are a violent people, but when we combine a tendency to violence with all of the means of communication that throw violence at us on every hand, then we have small children doing violent things--and we wonder what is wrong with them. We always have understood that drugs are a problem, but what we have not been prepared for is drugs in people's trunks, and kids bringing them to school and therefore people getting hooked on them. We have just never thought it would happen.

It seems that whenever we begin to face the dangers in our lives *we either go to one of two extremes. One extreme is that we minimize the danger: that won't hurt us, that is*

not a problem; I don't know why my mother and daddy are excited; I don't know why the police are talking about that; there is nothing to it. Sometimes we go to *the other* extreme and *we believe that we are so strong we can handle it ourselves*; and so we elevate our sense of our own importance and say that while others can get into trouble, we certainly cannot.

What I wanted to talk about with you today is *the greatest danger that you face in your life*. I understand the difficulty in doing that because most of the time we either downplay or overplay it ourselves, so we really don't sense that there is a problem out there. The Bible says there is, and it is the greatest problem you confront. So all of us need to hear, listen, and understand how we can overcome the problem. It is in the book of 1 Peter 5, and I want to start reading in verse 8. *"Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy,"* not your sometimes friend, your enemy, sworn to your destruction, who either wants to destroy you or dominate you, your enemy, *"the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking who he may devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, for you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."*

The Greek poet, Homer, created verses in which he invented an island on which lived some beautiful, young girls. The beautiful, young girls he called Sirens. To us a siren is a long, piercing sound which alerts us to dangers, but in Homer's poem Sirens were the dangers themselves. When men on ships would go past their island they would sing enchanting songs and play tunes on instruments. Homer said that men would literally tie themselves to the masts of their ships, but when they heard the songs of the Sirens they would have supernatural strength, break the cords, and turn

their ships toward the island. What they didn't understand was that just off the island were huge rocks which their ships would hit and be destroyed. The men would lose their lives.

What the Bible says is that in our world are spiritual sirens. There are beautiful and attractive voices that come to us, and there is a weakness inside of us--that is, even though we know it is not to our best interest, we will follow the songs that we hear. What you need to be aware of is that *while there is a God who wants to develop you, there are forces who are committed to destroy you.* Forty-three times Jesus warned us about the devil. In the past, there have been some societies that blamed the devil for everything. The devil was under every rock. That is not our problem. Our problem is that we don't think about him at all. We either make him a comic figure and laugh about him or we just deny his presence at all, and nothing makes him happier than that. We just go through life not aware of the dangers all around us; and so you need to understand that the Bible is trying to help you understand that there is a force, supernatural in power, who is seeking to lead you by temptation's songs to your own destruction. Now *one of the great keys in ever understanding your enemy is: don't ever underestimate his power.* Sadden Hussein decided one day that he would build biological, chemical weapons to try to destroy the people around him. Many of the forces of the world gathered their powers together and they all appeared at his doorstep. You understand that he had a million men under arms, a thousand tanks, he had fighter pilots, weapons of mass destruction. He had SCUD missiles. He thought he could do anything. Suddenly, there appeared another million men with a lot more airplanes than he had, and a lot more missiles, and in nine days he learned one of the lessons of warfare: never underestimate your enemy. One of the dangers that we make in our spiritual life is that in our culture we keep underestimating our enemy.

In the Bible, it says that you have an enemy. The Bible says he is like a roaring lion, and I understand that lions only roar when they are starving. Here is a predator, hungry, looking for anything to eat; and he is after all of us. *The Bible indicates that he has different names that help us to understand him. One of them is Devil.* The word *devil* means *slanderer*. What he does is tell lies about God because he wants you to think that God is the devil, himself. I have heard people describe their God; and their god is my devil. They blame him for all the problems of the world, for the problems in their lives; and I understand where all of that comes from, because the Bible says what the devil is trying to do is slander God.

The *second* word the Bible uses is the word *Satan*. The word *satan* means *adversary*, your enemy; he is after you. The book of Zechariah talks about Joshua being in the presence of an angel, and he said at his right hand was Satan, seeking to resist everything that he did. I am reminded of a little kid going to bed early one night. His mother asked him if he was sick and he said, "No, I am not sick, I am just tired. I have tried to be good all day long, and I am tired." Sometimes you understand that in trying to be good and do good you have to overcome battles and difficulties. Satan is always there as your adversary. If he is your adversary, you need to understand how he operates. There are men in our congregation who are veterans and there are men who are in the reserves; and what I am getting ready to tell you, you heard in boot camp. This is the way the enemy works. War always follows the same pattern. One of the things a war always has in propaganda. Propaganda, Hitler said, is telling a lie so many times you think it is true. Satan will come time and time again and tell you all of these lies, and tragically many Christians lose

the battle without even fighting. They just believe the propaganda. Warfare always includes diversion. That is the reason General Eisenhower built a whole army out of plywood and cardboard: he wanted Hitler to believe he was coming from one direction when all the while he was coming from another direction. You need to understand Satan is going to picture one thing when really he is after something else. Warfare always includes looking for the weak spot. Reconnaissance forces go out: where are the weaknesses, where are the strong points? He is always looking for your weak points. You need to understand that in your life you are facing an adversary and he knows a great deal about you.

Third thing: the Bible calls him the *deceiver*. The Bible translates that and it says *he is an angel of light. He says one thing but he means entirely the opposite*. Once a month, as you know, I go out to speak to the men who have just been introduced to the prison system of Virginia, about four hundred prisoners each time. When I have a chance to talk to the men they all tell me the same thing. Someone came to them and said, “Try this, it will not hurt you,” “Do this, no one will ever find out,” “Say this, it won’t matter;” and every month four hundred men end up in the penitentiaries of Virginia because they believed the lies they were taught. You need to understand that what you hear is not necessarily the truth and that words are manipulated to say one thing when really they mean something else. If you can’t see through that, you are in great difficulty.

The *fourth* word used in the Bible is *the god of this world*, which simply means that *there are two ways in which all of us receive communication. One of them is the horizontal way*; that is, something you tell me or someone else tells me or something I read. What the Bible says is that if you only go by the horizontal, you will always be in trouble.

The *last* word he is called in the Bible is *adversary*, and that is *a person who takes you to court and is trying to destroy you*. Please understand that if you ever underestimate your enemy, you are always going to find yourself in difficulty. I need to say that Satan always goes after two groups of people. *He goes after people who have never given their hearts and their lives to Christ; but he reserves his special energy for people who are disciples of Jesus*. Let me tell you why. Nothing would delight him more than to take one such person and destroy him. Let me tell you why he is after us. *What he learned in eternity is that he cannot destroy God, so what he wants to do now is destroy the people God loves*. You know that the greatest hurt that comes to you many times is not that which you receive, but the hurt that comes to the people you love. Satan knows he cannot destroy God, so what he is after are the people God loves. He wants to hurt God in this way. He is after one person, but listen to what he does to believers. A believer has the word of truth. You have the capacity not only to be effective and change yourself, but you can help other people. It is said the average person has twenty people that he has personal contact with who are his close friends. There are twenty centers of influence that you have, and what he wants is to stop that Christian influence. He wants to destroy your life so people will look at you and say, “My goodness, if that is what Christianity is I don’t want anything to do with it.” He wants to focus in on your life as a believer. A pastor made exactly that statement one day in a sermon, and he had a very close deacon- friend with whom he often went duck hunting. The next morning they got up early to go duck hunting, and the deacon said, “You made mention of the devil’s being after Christians and I don’t know whether I believe that or not.” The pastor didn’t say anything; but when they were in the duck blind and the ducks came through, the pastor shot a duck and it fell dead. He hit another one, and it was wounded and it was trying to fly

away. He took his dog that he had trained all of his life and he gave the signal. The dog jumped into the water and the pastor turned to his deacon friend and said, “Which duck do you think the dog is going to go after?” The deacon said, “The one who is trying to get away.” The pastor said, “That is what I was trying to tell you yesterday.” You see, if you are here today and God is only something that you curse, if you are not wrestling with any issues of right or wrong in your conscience, if you are not concerned about what kind of contribution you can make to the world instead of what the world can make to you, why does he have to spend any energy for you? He is concerned about is the person who is trying to do right, trying to invest himself in others, who has the message and is trying to talk to others. If you are a believer, his full attention is toward you.

Now what does this passage of Scripture tell you about how you can win this battle? *How can you face the enemy and overcome him?* Listen to the word. The Bible says, “*Be alert*,” and what that means is be alert all the time. Let me ask you a question. If you are going to get up in the morning and drive for eight hours, will it make much difference if you remain behind the wheel those eight hours and decide to sleep only five minutes? You drove seven hours and fifty-five minutes awake, but you decided to sleep for only five minutes while you were driving. I used to be worried about that when I was a young person, but I am not worried about it now. I fought that battle and I don’t have to fight that battle any more. What happens is that when we go to sleep and are not alert, the danger reappears. The Bible says to always be alert.

The Bible says to be *self-controlled*, and what that means is know your weaknesses. Do you know what the weaknesses in your spiritual life are? Have you ever sat down before God and said, “God, here are my weak points.” Let me tell you, if you don’t know them, Satan does, and what you need to understand is where your weaknesses are,

and by knowing them you know that you cannot expose yourself to them. There are things in my life that I don’t even want to let temptation come towards, for I know that I have a weakness in that area. The Bible says you need to know what your weaknesses are. The problem is, we are so carried away by ourselves that we don’t even know what our weaknesses are. We put ourselves into circumstances that we have no right to. Let me give you one illustration. God in His providence organized time. Man didn’t do that, God did that. He said, “*I want you to work six days, but I want to tell you you need to take a day out of every week to focus in on the most important thing*.” There are some in this room today who feel they can disobey God’s organization of time and they are strong enough and can take care of themselves. The Bible says if you are not alert and self-controlled, you are opening yourself up to difficulties.

Listen to the *third* one. We are to *resist him*. Listen very carefully, for this is the heart of what I am trying to say. You are not called on to defeat temptation. You are not given the assignment to defeat the devil in your life. That was done through the cross of Jesus Christ. *You are not to try to win the victory; you are to enter the conflict claiming the victory that has already been won*. Sometimes we keep asking God to help us win the victory, when we need to pray, “God, thank you that we have the victory in Christ.” We need to go as the victors, and not as people trying to win a battle. *You resist him, not in your own strength, but in the strength of Christ*.

Number *four*. *Be aware of others around you going through difficult problems*. Your brothers are undergoing the same thing. Satan will defeat you if he makes you think you are the only one who has this problem. So

if you are here and you realize something has a hold on you, you need to find a prayer partner, you need to find someone you can talk to, you need to find a support group, you need to find a Sunday School class, you need to get around people who understand and care for you; and you will begin to find out there are others who have the same difficulty and together, hand in hand, you can walk down life's path.

The last one. He said, "*Focus your mind on the God of all grace who calls you to His glory.*" Let me tell you how that poem ends that Homer wrote. It ends with a man by the name of Ulysses. Ulysses had gone off to fight the wars and he was on his way back home. He knew he had to pass the island where the Sirens lived. He knew that if he took his men that way they would be destroyed. He knew that was the only way home. Ulysses knew what he would do. He would teach his men to sing and when they began to get near the island he turned to the men and he said, "You sing." When they began to sing they were more beautiful in voice than the sirens on the island, and they went safely by.

The only way you will ultimately defeat all the sirens' songs of this world is to hear a more beautiful song. You will not spend your life saying, "I don't want this;" you will spend your life saying, "I want Him." You will fall so in love with Christ that the other songs sound like discord. They have no attraction to you any more. You want what He has to offer you. *The closer you know Him, the more you walk with Him, the less important everything else seems.*