

We Have an Enemy

Take a look at the top 40 songs for nearly any week of the last 50 years, you will find pretty much the same thing— sex, drugs, and rock and roll. You will find infatuation and broken hearts. You'll find declarations of love and commitment for couples that break up three months later. You will find odes to beer, wine, and other adult beverages. There are songs that revel in rebellion. There are songs about dancing, partying, and good times. Sometimes there are motivational tunes like *We are the Champions*, *Fight Song* or *Roar*.

During times of crisis, a protest song may take a peek at the top 40. Every once in a while, a charity song will become a hit— think *We are the World* or *Tears in Heaven*. If you're looking at the country charts you'll also find anthems singing the praises of trucks and the occasional melody celebrating friendship or cheering God and country.

We're not talking about any of those songs. For the next five weeks we're going to be looking at some rare birds— top 40 hits that get at theological truth. These are more than songs that make a moral point, have a spiritual theme, or use biblical language in their lyrics. These are five songs from five different eras that get into some part of the gospel message of salvation.

We begin with a 1968 hit song whose seeds were sewn in 1930s Soviet Union and watered by a 19th Century French poet. In the 1930s, communist dictator, Joseph Stalin, ruled the Soviet Union with an iron fist. By the end of his brutal reign some 20 million dissidents were killed, enslaved, imprisoned, disappeared or deported.

Against this backdrop, Author Mikhail Bulgakov wrote a dark satire called *The Master and the Margarita*. The book grappled with the ideas of good and evil in the atheistic communist regime. Bulgakov's novel portrayed the devil visiting 1930s Russia in the disguise of a distinguished professor. It juxtaposed this visit to devil's role in the crucifixion of Jesus.

It took Bulgakov 12 years to finish his novel which he barely completed by his death in 1940. It sat unpublished until an edited version was published in a Soviet magazine in 1967. Copies were then smuggled out of the Soviet Union where it was printed as a book in Paris. It was one of these editions that found its way into the hands of English singer, Marianne Faithfull, who in turn passed it on to her boyfriend, Rolling Stones lead singer, Mick Jagger.

Jagger was also influenced by French poet, Charles Baudelaire. In his book, *The Generous Gambler*, the main character has a conversation with the devil. The devil confesses that the only time he feared for his power was when he heard a preacher declare from the pulpit, "My dear brethren, never forget, when you hear the progress of wisdom vaunted, that the cleverest ruse of the Devil is to persuade you he does not exist."

Jagger read these books at a vulnerable time. 1967 had been a tumultuous year for the Rolling Stones. The bandmates had found themselves neck deep in fame, money, drugs and legal

troubles. (Show Picture) Mick Jagger and guitarists, Keith Richards and Brian Jones had all been charged with drug crimes. Jagger and Richards were tried, convicted, and sentenced to jail. Jagger for 3 months while Richards was to serve a full year. However, massive public outrage in Britain led to them only serving 1 night.

There was also turmoil in the band when the girlfriend of one Stone's guitarist dumped him to date the other. Their longtime producer and manager quit because the band often did not show up in the studio when scheduled, and when they did there would be dozens of hangers-on in their entourage. Their previous album had generated negative reviews as well as accusations that they had copied the Beatles.

The world outside was filled with strife as well. (Show Picture) The war in Vietnam was in full swing. There were protests and riots in the streets of European and American cities. Campus uprisings were a daily feature in the news. Czechoslovakia and Poland were both bucking at Soviet control and the Soviet Union flexed its muscles in response. All this political unrest was highlighted by the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy in 1968 while the Stones were in the studio recording their next album.

In this environment, Mick Jagger was wrestling with the reality of evil in the world as well as in his own life. (Show Picture) In this week's song, singer Mick Jagger takes on the persona of Bulgakov's and Baudelaire's devil, introducing himself as a sophisticated socialite, a man of wealth and taste. However, he keeps his identity under wraps until the end of the song, repeatedly inviting the listener to guess his name.

Jagger's devil boasts about playing a central role in some of history's most notorious atrocities—the crucifixion of Jesus, the communist revolution in Russia, the Hundred Years War, the Nazi Blitzkrieg, and the assassination of the Kennedys. When the devil finally does reveal his identity, he asks for the listener's sympathy and understanding, because, after all, the devil accuses, humanity was complicit in all these evils.

(Play song snippet)

The song's lyrics affirm that human evil is real, that Satan is pulling the strings behind the scenes to accomplish much more nefarious purposes. Keith Richards has said of the song, "It was a time of turmoil. It was the first sort of international chaos since World War II...You want to think the world is perfect...[but] you can't hide. You might as well accept the fact that evil is there and deal with it any way you can. 'Sympathy for the Devil' is a song that says, Don't forget him. If you confront him, then he's out of job."

These are realities that Scripture also affirms. The gospel message of salvation begins with the basic premise that something has gone seriously wrong with our world. The good news begins with bad news. The very fact that we need Salvation means we have to be saved from something.

The Bible tells us what that something is. God created a perfect world, but God's word also tells us what's gone wrong in that world.

Two things. We'll look at the second thing next week. The first part is the reality of evil, and the source of that evil is a fallen angel, whom the Bible calls the Satan. Satan is not a name. It is a title – a job title really. It means the accuser, or the slanderer. Satan is the one who brings charges against us.

Here's what the apostle Paul has to say about this reality.

(2 Slides) 10 Finally, 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. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. **(Next Slide)** 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

We Have an Enemy

When I first began outlining this message the point I wrote down was this, "There is an enemy." But as I worked on the sermon, I realized that's too distant. It's too impersonal. There is an enemy. It's worse than that. WE have an enemy. You have an enemy. I have an enemy.

Verse 11 calls him the devil. *Diabolos* in the Greek. *Diabolos* means one who slanders, who accuses. He is the one who accuses you. He slanders you. He tells you that you will never measure up, that you don't have what it takes, that you will fail, that you will disappoint. He'll make you believe that you have nothing to offer and no gifts to use. He'll convince you that God doesn't love you, that He doesn't want you, and He can't use you.

Verse 16 calls him the evil one. Our enemy is the opposite of everything good and wholesome and righteous. He is pure, unadulterated, irredeemable evil.

The Bible calls him by many different names. The accuser. The destroyer. The father of lies. The murderer. The deceiver of the nations, the thief, the tempter, and, of course, the enemy.

Make no mistake, the devil hates you. The accuser doesn't love you. The destroyer doesn't want you. The murderer wants to destroy you. The father of lies will tempt you. He will tease you. The deceiver will promise you the world. He will make fools bargains with you, but just like Lucy in Peanuts always pulls the football before Charlie Brown can ever kick it, the thief will never give you what he promised, and he will always take more than you bargained to give.

Our Enemy is Spiritual

Here's the second thing you need to understand about our enemy— our enemy is spiritual. We have a spiritual enemy.

We have an enemy, and it's not someone in this room. It's not someone in your family. It's not –you-know-who- from work. It's not a political party. It's not this or that group of people.

Certainly, the enemy may use those people. He may work through those people. They may be victims of the enemy. They may even willingly cooperate with the enemy at times. But – and hear me on this – they are NOT the enemy. Here's a news flash, the real enemy sometimes even uses you.

Our enemy is Satan and his minions.

And he is a spiritual enemy. Paul is very clear about this in verse 12, *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood."* Our enemy is not people. Satan loves it when we begin to fight with each other. Satan loves it when we begin to expend our time our energy, our effort into attacking other people as the enemy. Satan loves it when we think the enemy is someone with skin on, because as long as we think they are the enemy, then we are not defending against the real enemy.

There is a reality that is greater than the physical world we can see and hear and touch and experience with our five senses. There is a spiritual dimension to life that encompasses and transcends everything. This is what Paul calls the heavenly realms. It's called that because this reality is greater than, higher than the physical realm. The created cosmos exists within this greater spiritual realm. That's where we'll find our real enemy, and that's where the bulk of our defenses needs to be aimed.

Our Enemy is Organized

We also see here that our enemy is organized. Our enemy is more than just Satan. The devil has a host of allies. Verse 12 says our struggle is *"against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

Paul is talking about ranks and layers of demonic, spiritual forces. Satan did not rebel against God alone. Revelation 12 suggests one third of the angels rebelled along with Satan. Their attempted coup failed. They were cast out of heaven.

Paul describes these demons as having a chain of command with varying levels of spiritual power. Verse 12 is like the ranks of military command. It starts with the general on top, and you have you colonels, majors, captains, lieutenants, and sergeants all the way down to your privates. You could also see these as the various layers of government from the emperor, to the provincial governors all the way down to city magistrates.

Satan and his evil minions are more than the hounds of hell, a ravenous pack of spiritual wolves bloodthirsty and on the scent of human souls. The point is there is a structure and an organization to our enemy that is arrayed against us.

Our Enemy Has a Plan

And not only is our enemy organized, our enemy has a plan. “*Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s...*” What? *Schemes.*” That word *schemes* is important. *Schemes* means that the devil is wily, crafty, and devious. Our enemy has a plan. He has a strategy, a game plan.

He will use any kind of trickery and subterfuge to tempt you, stall you, distract you, and ultimately destroy you. His machinations work because they appear attractive and desirable, but they are nothing more than a baited trap.

In verse 12, Paul calls our battle against our enemy a *struggle*. This is sort of an odd word choice, because this wasn’t a normal military term for battle. In the 1st Century, this was the word used for the sport of wrestling. And we’re not talking about professional wrestling here. Get all images of Hulk Hogan, The Rock, or the Undertaker out of your mind. There is nothing phony or scripted about this struggle.

Think of ultimate fighting. That’s much closer to the actual picture. There were no rounds, no gloves, and no time limit. Oh, and you were naked. There were only three rules: you weren’t allowed to gouge out the eyes of your opponent. You weren’t allowed to bite them, and you couldn’t attack the genitals. Everything else was fair game.

Some scholars think Paul used this wrestling term because the sport was real popular in the part of the Roman Empire where the city of Ephesus was. These Ephesian Christians would have been real familiar with the sport and what it involved.

But I think Paul also used this term because it is personal. It is up close and in your face. This is in modern terms what is called CQB—close-quarters combat. It’s hand to hand fighting. For you gamers out there, it’s melee combat, but there is nothing virtual about it. It’s very real.

One other thing I should point out here is the way this is written in the Greek tells us that our enemy’s attacks are continual and repeated. This isn’t just a one-time assault. No, the enemy will come at you again and again and again. He knows where you are weak. He knows your vulnerabilities. He will come at you from every different angle until he gets you right where he wants you.

And what is Satan’s ultimate goal? It’s not to tempt you. It’s not to get you to sin. It is to get you to spend eternity in hell with him. He knows he’s going down, and he’s determined to take you with him. That’s it. As the Rolling Stones song says, Satan wants to “lay your soul to waste.”

Every strategy, every temptation, every attack is designed to get you to turn your back on Jesus, walk away from his forgiveness, and to see your soul in hell for all eternity.

But praise God, the sermon does not end here. If this is all these verses taught us, it would sound like our defeat is certain. But that's not what this passage is about.

We Can Stand Against the Enemy

Yes, our enemy is real. Yes, our enemy is organized. Our enemy has a plan, but these verses are all about victory. And here's the encouraging, empowering truth— you can be armed against our enemy. You can *“be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.”* This strength is not our own. By myself I can never hope to stand against the devil, and neither can you. But through the power of God, the power of the resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we can overpower the enemy.

Once we put on the full armor of God, we can stand against any of the devil's schemes. All of his strategies are destined to fail before the power of God. Four times in these verses, the apostle Paul talks about standing strong. Verse 11, *“Take your stand against the devil's schemes.”* Verse 13 and 14, *“when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything to stand. Stand firm then.”* He then goes on to describe all the pieces of armor that will empower us to stand.

Against a spiritual enemy, we have been equipped with spiritual armor— truth, righteousness, the peace of the gospel, faith, salvation, and the word of God. These are the things that will defeat the devil and his schemes every time.

But here's the thing about our spiritual armor— you have to put it on. That's a choice you have to make. God supplies the armor, but you have to put it on. If you're not willing to stand for what is true and right, if you are not willing to stand in faith, if you're not willing to stand on the word of God, you will not stand. You will fall.

Let me point something else out. Nowhere in this passage are we urged to win the victory. We don't have to defeat Satan. We're merely called to stand our ground, to stand firm, to stand strong. Why? Because the decisive victory over the devil and his dark powers has already been won, and their final defeat is imminent. All we have to do is stand. The war has already been won. And if we stand, we will share in the victory.

This isn't the first time Paul has talked about the mighty power of God in this little letter of Ephesians. In Ephesians chapter 1, beginning with verse 19, Paul writes about God's

incomparably great power for us who believe. (That's great power for you and for you and you.) That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, (doesn't this sound like what we

read in chapter 6) *and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*

Do you hear that? Jesus has already defeated every ruler, every authority, every power and every dominion. Every one. Including Satan. There is not one demon that can escape the power of Jesus' resurrection. There isn't one sin that is exempt. There isn't one temptation that is excluded. All are under the dominion of our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We just stand in his power.

I want to end by making this affirmation together. Say this with me.

"I can be strong in Him and in his mighty power." (Repeat 3x)

Next week we jump all the way to 2022 with a song that hit both the country and rock charts, hitting number 1 and 4 respectively. It's an autobiographical song that really tells the story of each and every one of us.

Cut Material

Sympathy for Devil began life as a Bob Dylan-like folk song, but after 32 takes in the studio, the song still lacked something. Keith Richards then switched to bass, and the usual bass player, Bill Wyman, played percussion and gave the song a fiendish samba groove. Meanwhile, some of those hangers-on in the control room provided the now famous "Who Whos" turning the song into the famous hit it became.

Sympathy for the Devil was a worldwide smash charting in the top 40 in 22 countries including 13 top 10 appearances. In the U.S. where it faced a huge Christian backlash, its chart performance was more muted, hitting only 55 on the Billboard hot 100. Over the years, however, *Sympathy's* legacy has continued to grow. *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked it as number 106 in their 500 Greatest Songs of All Time.

This was one instance where the North American church was guilty of a knee-jerk reaction. Had they looked a little closer at *Sympathy for the Devil*, they would not have found a wholehearted endorsement of the devil, but a rather clever takedown.