

Intel into the Evil One

John 8:42-59 (ESV)

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, defend us from the evil one. Break and hinder every evil plan of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. Amen.

When you are going to battle, it helps to have intel. Whether in war or in competition, sports or a rivalry, you can gain the advantage if you know how your opponent might act. And it might hurt if you enter in blind, unaware of your opponent's strategy and tactics. God gives you in the Gospel reading for today intel into the evil one, the devil. He shows you how the devil and his children act: how they attack the children of God and seek to win. God does not want to leave you in the dark about which ways the devil seeks to overthrow God's people. In the reading, the Jews show the character of all those who act against the children of God. Their actions against Jesus are an example of the ones who model the true evil one, Satan, the liar, and father of lies. This is what they model:

THE EVIL ONE HATES THE TRUTH.

The first thing the evil one does is he mislabels the children of God. The Jews in this account think that Jesus is of the devil. They throw around slanders and epithets; they try to pin terms of abuse on our Lord. When these Jews don't like what Jesus has to say, they call him names, "**Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?**" These Jews think they can silence Jesus by throwing names around which they think will bring Jesus shame. They figure that if Jesus becomes enough of a stench to others (who would want to associate with a demon-possessed man), he will be quiet. Those who work against the children of God in this day and age will do the same. When they hear what Christians have to say about what it means to be a human, what it means to be a good citizen, a good person, they are very offended. So, they throw epithets around: misogynist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, prudes, hateful, authoritarian, alt-right. They will try to pin these on you so you cannot say what the Bible says. That's their goal: to eliminate the truth.

Our Lord Jesus is not phased by name-calling. He is not offended by the slander. When the Jews react in that way, Jesus lays the situation bare; he explains why they are reacting in this way. He tells them the truth: you are not of God. If you were of God, if God was your Father, then you would love me. Our Lord is confident in who he is; he knows that he is the eternal Son of God. Nobody will silence him by evil words or

actions. He is able to stand there and take the smearing of his name. Dear Christian, you have the same confidence. Remember these words: **“But to all who did receive Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”** You who receive Jesus have the authority, the right, the guarantee that you are of God, that you have the truth, that you cannot be defamed.

Jesus continues to make things plain when it comes to those Jews who speak against him. And he means to show how all those act who recoil from his truth. Our Lord says, **“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires.”** He demonstrates the danger of their thinking: the danger is that it’s the devil’s thinking. Jesus marks the paths: either you are of God or you are of the devil. Those who speak such harshness against God and against his people show that they are doing the work of the devil. If they were of God (which they claim to be), then they would love Jesus and love his words. And this isn’t only true of those who claim to be followers of the one true God (as these Jews do). This is true of those who mislabel and slander those who speak the truth today. They might claim a different god (they are working for “justice,” “freedom,” “human rights”, “human dignity”), but they have the same reaction to the truth as these Jews do. They cannot love Jesus and his words.

The second thing the evil one does is he misjudges the words of Jesus. When they hear the truth from Jesus’ mouth, they do not like it. They stop their ears and will not listen. When Jesus defends himself, when Jesus says that he is not seeking his own glory, but he wants to glorify the Father, the Jews will have none of it. They say, **“Now we know you have a demon...Are you greater than our father Abraham or the prophets...Who do you make yourself out to be?”** Because they rejected his person, they will have to reject his words. They sound like the sayings of a madman. They think themselves as the sane ones, as the one who are able to judge Jesus.

What do they compare Jesus to? What is their measurement of truth and falsehood? For these Jews, they treasured their fathers, their traditions, their elders. They held them up to be their idols. They trusted in these without asking the question, “Is what we believe about what Abraham said, or Moses said, or the elders said, actually conform to what God says in the Scriptures?” They thought they knew the truth. At another point they will say, **“We know that God has spoken to Moses.”** They think what they believe has divine authority, but they are too proud to ask themselves, “Am I going against what God says?” They will never question themselves, even if they are believing in lies. Even if the followers of the evil one in our day and age do not claim to follow God and his truth, they have their own idols. They have their own barometer to measure everyone else against. For them, freedom is the truth. Anything that limits one’s self-expression or self-understanding is evil, is oppressive. This thinking ultimately leads to pride and arrogance; a pride and arrogance which excludes any ability to question if they believe the truth. They set themselves up to reject the words of

Jesus just because it automatically sounds crazy; it sounds to them like it comes from a demon.

Against this pride and arrogance of the Jews, is the humility of Jesus and the children of God. After the Jews continue to accuse him of being demonic, Jesus answers: **“I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.”** Jesus does not speak for his own glory. He lets himself be slandered; he lets lies be spoken about him. Yet, what he will not give up is the truth. He will continue to speak and defend his Father, the one who has sent the Son to teach the truth. He lets his Father do the ultimate judgment. The Father seeks for his Son to be honored. The Father will work to judge and vindicate his Son. So, dear Christian, be encouraged by this fact: if you are slandered, if you are ridiculed, the Father seeks to honor you. He will vindicate you, if not now, if not soon, then for certainty in the age to come.

Our Lord Jesus also shows that his opponents will never be convinced by arguments. He could have continued, days on end, trying to show them from the Scriptures how what he says was true. But, the Jews will never have accepted it because they hated him. Jesus says, **“If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here.”** If they were faithful children of God, then these Jews would love Jesus and listen to his word. Instead, they were disgusted by anything he said. Since they hate Jesus, they cannot be of God and receive his truth. They need their hearts changed. They need more than words and logic. They need to receive the power of God; the power of a clean heart and a renewed spirit. They need to be born again by the water and the Spirit before they can receive spiritual things. Thus it is with those in our day and age. Those who defame Christians and those who speak God’s truth will not be won by lofty speech or worldly wisdom. They will be won by the power of God’s word, which has the power of his Holy Spirit. It is not an instant process, but a deliberate process. A deliberate process of showing love and care even for the evil and the wicked because Christ has suffered and died for this soul.

After mislabeling the Son of God and misjudging Jesus’ words, the evil one, lastly, tries to kill the one sent by God. After Jesus had made it plain, that these Jews were rejecting and defaming the very God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Jews, **“picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.”** What caused this hostile reaction? What caused the Jews to leave behind all propriety? What caused them to do such a despicable thing as wanting to shed innocent blood in the holy place, the temple? It was a reaction to these words of Jesus, **“Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”** Jesus was not mincing words. With this statement, “Before Abraham was, I am”, Jesus was saying, “I am your God. I am the God which you should be worshipping. I am the God you should be listening to.” The Jews could not stand that their enemy could be claiming to be their God. So, they tried to take matters into their hands, by trying to murder an innocent man. Jesus knew

that this was not his hour to die, so he escaped by hiding himself and leaving the temple, preserving his life for the moment it was necessary for him to die.

This moment though shows that the evil one will resort to murder to accomplish his evil works. Nothing is off the table for him and his followers, no matter how disgusting and unfathomable. What is your protection against this? Listen to the words of your dear Lord, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”** Against the devil and his weapon, death, you have your Lord Jesus, his words, and in the end, *life*. Because you are of God, because you listen and keep Jesus’ words, you will never see death. What does this mean? Because I have, and you have, seen plenty of Jesus’ followers who have died. Are Jesus’ words nullified? No, for Jesus means that for those who keep his word, death is like going to sleep. For Christians, death should be like your resting for the night. Even if it is hard to imagine (and it is hard when you are in the throes of death), take these words of Jesus to heart. He promises a death that is but a slumber because you have eternal life in him. This is especially a great comfort when the evil one and his followers try to threaten Christians with threats of death. Their death is meaningless compared to the life of Jesus.

This promise of Jesus is guaranteed by his death and resurrection. He is the one who saw death, but was not conquered by it. He kept his Father's word and was vindicated. Death for him was but a short sleep; until he should break down the door to the tomb to live forever. Our Lord's promise is not just some well meaning wish, but it is proven and secured by the power of his own resurrection. So, while you live in the midst of the evil one and his followers, you can be assured that their death is a mere toy and a fake compared to the life of Jesus.

This story of our Lord's encounter with the hostile Jews is a great example to you dear Christian. It shows you how the evil one works; how he tries to tear down God's children by mislabeling them, misjudging their words, and eventually threatening their lives. Yet, this example gives more than just intel on the devil. It also gives you the word of promise so that you can be confident in your own struggle against the lies of the evil one. You can be confident to proclaim God's truth, to speak his word to the benefit of your family, your congregation, and your communities because you will not see death. You have the word of Jesus which will not fail. You have the words of the true God of Israel. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.