

## A Battle for Your Heart

Martin Luther at times spoke of how the forces of good (that is God), and the forces of evil (that is the Devil), battle for human hearts. To a large extent, modern people, with all our arrogance, often smirk at such a notion. We consider Luther's idea quaint, and so we no longer need to pay attention to it.

But I believe that Luther is correct. When I look out into the world, that is exactly what I see. I see all kinds of forces that are at work on people, vying to take control of our hearts. Some are good, and I tend to associate these with God, and some not so good, even evil, and I tend to associate these with the Devil.

This morning, for example, consider the caregivers (the Tias) of the children at the For His Children orphanages we support in Ecuador. Every day and every night despite the coronavirus pandemic, they have shown up for work, to take care of these orphan children, to love them, and to share their faith in Jesus with them.

God has won the battle for their hearts.

Jesus tells us a parable today about this battle in the reading from Matthew, the parable of the Sower. The sower in this story, who we would call a farmer, is a force of good (of God) in the world. How do we know this? Well, he is planting, he is spreading God's good Word in the form of seed, all over the world.

This sower does not discriminate either. He simply spreads the Word of God everywhere. He doesn't worry if there's a good chance the Word will take root in a person to create a believer or not. The sower simply spreads God's Word in full hope of a great harvest, in full hope that many will come to faith in Christ.

So, what are the forces of evil in this parable?

Jesus says the birds. They are the Devil himself, seeking to snatch God's Word from our hearts. He says the rocky ground. They are the troubles and persecutions of life, causing our hearts to fall away from God's Word. He says the thorns. These are our worries, like money, squeezing God's Word out of our hearts.

And so, the battle for human hearts, for our hearts is on!

However, keep in mind that the parable is ultimately positive about the battle's outcome. In the end, it says the harvest of human hearts, people who believe the Word of God and live by it in this life, will be undeniably abundant. In fact, it will be abundant beyond expectation. The fruit of God's Word will be everywhere.

I think Jesus tells us this parable to give us hope in God, and hope in God's Word. Sometimes our experiences in life leave us embattled by evil things, by trouble and persecution, by all the things we worry about in life. We become sort of beaten up by evil forces in the world, and hopelessness can follow.

But here Jesus says the battle for human hearts is not dependent on us defeating evil, but on him. He is the sower. He spreads the Word of God everywhere, on every human heart, to attain the very abundant harvest God intends. He spreads the Word of God into our hearts, so that we too, may be part of that harvest.

The Apostle Paul also speaks about the battle for human hearts in Romans, chapter 8. Paul talks about this battle in terms of human flesh and the Spirit of God. According to Paul, our human flesh is weak. We are weak when it comes to things like sin, evil, and death. On our own, we lose these and all battles.

But we are not alone. We are in Christ Jesus, according to Paul, meaning Christ is in us. In Romans 8:9, Paul says to us:

You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you.

This, of course, is the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. This Spirit, this power of God, is in your heart.

So, with the Holy Spirit in your heart, the battle for your heart is a foregone conclusion. You are safe and you are saved by God, who has sown his Word into your heart, and who has sent his Holy Spirit to live there. This is your assurance, your blessed assurance, that you are part of the great harvest to come.

Of course, this does not mean that the forces of evil, the Devil, the troubles and persecutions of this world, and the worries of this life, will not continue to embattle us. You can count on it. They will not give up easy, even though Jesus has been raised from the dead, even though the Holy Spirit lives in you.

Yet our hope for today, this life, and the future is certain. The Word of God is sown into your heart. The Holy Spirit lives in your heart. So, you are safe, and you are saved, every day. As you face the forces of evil in your life, you have the risen Lord Jesus alongside you. Jesus is both at your side and on your side.

I know someone who is battling cancer. It has been a physical, emotional, and spiritual battle for her, because cancer is attacking her whole person. Every day she faces the physical pain of this battle, the emotional struggle of overcoming cancer, as well as the spiritual struggle of staring death straight in the eye.

No one ever said living or dying is easy. But as this person faces these battles, she does so with God's Word sown into her heart, and with God's Holy Spirit living inside her heart. So, as hard as this battle is for her at times, and no matter the outcome, she has the assurance and hope of a bright and wondrous future.

From her perspective, she is waiting for Jesus. She says, perhaps he'll come to heal her cancer. She's praying for this. Perhaps he'll come to take her to heaven. She hopes many years from now. Perhaps he'll come at the end of the age to bring all believers into his kingdom. To this, she says, "Come, Lord Jesus, come."

Indeed, God has won the battle for her heart.

Martin Luther believed it was important for Christian people to have confidence in God, that he had won the battle for their heart. So, one of his favorite Bible verses was from John 16:33. Through this verse, Jesus gave Luther the confidence he needed to wake up every morning and live the way he thought was right.

In John 16:33, Jesus says: "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecutions. But take courage; I have conquered the world."

You see, as embattled as Luther was by hardship and evil forces in his life, this verse functioned as reassurance for him that God was taking care of him, that God had indeed won the battle for his heart, that God would give him the strength and peace he needed for each day, and that God would give him eternal life.

Here again, Jesus addresses the idea of a battle for human hearts. Troubles, persecutions, hardship, and worries, vie to take control of our hearts. But with the Word of God sown in our hearts, with the Holy Spirit living in our hearts, we too are confident in God's care, in God's strength and peace, and in eternal life.

In other words, we too will be part of a truly abundant harvest, because God has won the battle for our hearts.

Amen.