

You might remember from several years ago a movie by the name of "The Ghost and the Darkness," starring Val Kilmer and [Michael] Douglas, telling the true story of the lions of Tsavo. And the way that that story goes, if you remember, is that the British were building a railroad bridge near the village of Tsavo in Africa. And while they were doing that, they were attacked by a pair of lions that were killing a lot of their workers. They couldn't seem to do anything about it. These lions were killing for no reason. They were killing over and over again, almost as if they were doing it for sport. And the way the movie finally ended, of course, was that Col. John Patterson, played by Val Kilmer, ends up killing both of the lions. It's a very exciting movie, right? It's kind of dramatic. It's kind of scary even a little bit. It's the kind of movie that you want to watch again and again, because you feel some of the fear that they must have felt being attacked by these lions and hearing them roaring in the distance and all that sort of thing. But if you ever have seen the movie, you'll know that at the very end of the movie, the narrator warns us. He says, if you go to America, you can see these lions for yourself. They are in Chicago, of all places. They're part of the exhibit at the Natural History Museum, so you can go and see the man-eating lions of Tsavo. But he warns us, and he says, don't lock eyes with them, because even now they could still inspire fear in us, a fear that will catch us just as much as it did those men all those years ago in Tsavo.

But I've been to Chicago a few times in my life. I've even been to the Natural History Museum a couple of times. I have seen the man-eating lions of Tsavo face-to-face. And they're not that scary. Because nowadays they're just stuffed. They have glass eyes and the only thing real about them anymore is the hide that covers them. They just don't inspire fear in the way that the movie wants you to be afraid. And so you kind of come away from it the way you look at any other exhibit. You say, "Well, that's interesting." I read the little plaque about them, look at them for a minute, and then move on. You just can't take them seriously anymore, because they are just fake.

But Christians, Peter is warning us in his reading here, as we close this book for this evening, of an adversary who is seeking to destroy us. He is a lion who is seeking to devour us, a lion who is trying to destroy us, a lion who wants nothing more than to bring us down so that we would fall away from God. And the funny thing is, Christians, that this lion wants us to take him not very seriously. Because it would make him all kinds of happy if we didn't take him seriously, if we looked at him as something fake, if we looked at him as something not to be worried about. Because then when he does attack us, we will not be ready for him. We will not be able to withstand, because we will have convinced ourselves that he's just something fake, like those lions in Chicago. The Bible calls him by many names. He is called the devil. He is called Satan, the deceiver, the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the enemy of mankind. And Peter warns for us to be on guard against him, to be ready for him in every circumstance, so that he will not catch us off-guard. Because the devil is not some cartoony figure with horns and red skin and a pitchfork and hooves, the way that we sometimes draw him in cartoons. No, he is someone to be contended with. He is someone very dangerous, someone we have to watch for.

So what does the Bible tell us about Satan? What do we know about this enemy that we are supposed to watch for? The Bible tells us that he is our adversary, that he is the one who accuses us before God. That's what the word Satan actually means: one who opposes, our adversary, the one who brings a case against us before God. We see that truth in Job chapters 1 and 2, where

God is speaking to Satan as he standing before him about Job himself. And he says, "Have you considered my servant Job? All of these good things that he is doing and how he fears me?" But Satan accuses Job to God and says, "The only reason why Job fears you, God, is because you're too nice to him. Take everything away from him that you have given to him, and he will curse you to your face." That was a lie, of course. Job did not curse God in that way. But that's what Satan does. He accuses. He tries to bring us down and to throw our sins before us so that we might think that we are outside of God's love.

The Bible also says that he is a tempter, that he tries to lure us away from the truth, that he tries to tempt us from the ways of God and to tempt us into the ways of sin. We see that very clearly in Genesis chapter 3, when Satan tempted Eve to take the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and to eat from it, even though God had commanded her not to do so. And because he was successful in that temptation, we have all become sinners before God. Satan led us into death by his temptation. He even tried to tempt Jesus, when Jesus was in the wilderness for 40 days, tempting him to not trust in his Father, tempting him to walk away from the mission that he had come to do. It didn't work, of course, but that didn't stop Satan from trying.

The Bible tells us that Satan is a murderer, that he has always been a murderer, that he seeks to destroy the things of God. After all, as Peter tells us, he is like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. He would love nothing better than to kill our soul, because in so doing, he kills what God has done. And he is always opposed to what God has done.

The Bible tells us that Satan is a deceiver. He tries to make himself look better than he actually is, tries to make it seem like he is our friend. Think about what he said to Eve. He said, "When you eat this fruit, you're going to be wise. You will be like God. Things will be better for you. Just don't listen to God. You know what's better for you than God knows what's better for you. So just listen to what I'm saying." Paul calls him an angel of light, someone who tries to pass himself off as good and right and virtuous.

But above all Christians, the Bible calls Satan a liar. The truth is not in him. He has been a liar from the beginning. And that is exactly what Peter is warning us about in this reading, that Satan is a liar seeking to devour us. Because when you are suffering as a Christian, Satan will come to you, and he will lie to you, and he will try to get you to not listen to God. Because what are the lies that Satan tells us? Think of this one. He will say, "You're suffering," Satan will say, "because God doesn't love you. Because God doesn't really care about you. You're suffering these things because God has better things to do, and he is just going to leave you alone to suffer all by yourself. So just let it all go. Go the way of the world. Then you won't have to suffer anymore." But that's a lie! A lie designed to destroy us. Satan will come to us and he will say, "You are suffering because you're a sinner! You deserve this. You deserve the things that you are suffering. It should be even worse than what it is. God has thrown all of these things on you, because he thinks you're a sinner and he is giving you the just judgment for your sins. So just let it all go. Go the way of the world, and everything will be better for you." But it's a lie, Christians! A lie designed to destroy us. Or Satan will come and say, "You're suffering something that no one else has ever suffered, that no one else has it as bad as you. And you are going to suffer for a very, very long time. It's not something that's just going to go away, so you

might as well get used to it. Things aren't going to get better." But that's a lie, Christians! A lie designed to destroy us. Because that's what Satan does. He lies. That's all he can do, is lie.

So don't listen to him! Because he is only seeking to devour you. But resist him, Christians, firm in your faith! Stand firm against him! Because even though he lies, he is not greater than Jesus. Jesus does care for you, so don't be anxious, as Peter says. Cast all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. The things you suffer right now, yes, they are difficult, and it may seem like God doesn't care. But God disciplines us for our good. He loves us. And all of these things which are happening to us when we suffer as Christians are meant for our good. He will give us something far greater than what we have lost now.

And Jesus also says, don't worry about it. Don't be anxious about what the future might hold. And don't think that you are in this alone! These things which you are enduring is happening to your brotherhood throughout the world. You are not alone in this. You belong to God, and we belong to one another as the body of Christ. And together as that body of Christ, we can withstand the attacks of the devil. We have one another to lean on and to find support in the day of trouble. So don't think that this is just something you're doing all by yourself. You have God and your fellow Christians with you every step of the way.

But above all Christians, this will not go on forever. These things which we suffer right now will come to an end. And they will come to an end quickly. Because after you have suffered a little while, as Peter says, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore you. He will lift you up again, so that you will not be left down in the pit. The God of all grace, will confirm you. He will strengthen you for the day of battle. And the God of all grace will establish you. He will be your fortress. He will be the one who will be with you every step of the way. These things you suffer will go on for but a little while, and then the glories that will be ours in God will go on forever.

So don't be afraid, Christians, and certainly don't listen to Satan. He doesn't have your best interests in mind. But God does. And he will bring you to himself. Satan's already been defeated. He's lost, and he knows it. That's why he's trying so hard. But Jesus has won the victory forever. So follow after Jesus, Christian soldiers! Follow after him because he will not fail you. He will strengthen you for the day of battle. And when all of these things have come to an end--and they will come to an end quickly--Jesus will give us a glory that will never come to an end. Jesus is your fortress in the day of trouble, so hold on to him no matter what.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.