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*(Disclaimer: This is a transcript of the sermon and, therefore, doesn't follow normal rules of grammar, punctuation, etc.)*

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his good are safe. But when a stronger one attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides the spoil.

The strong man there is Satan who wants to guard you. He wants to guard your hearts and your homes. He's fully armed and he doesn't want to let you go. But the stronger man is Jesus who attacks him and overcomes him. This is good vs. evil. Good vs. Evil. We sometimes get the idea that we made up this whole "good vs. evil" thing just so we could make good movies and write good books and so forth. Well, nobody made that up. Any good book that you've read that you've really liked is just based off this true story, this reality of good vs evil. Any good movie that you've watched (and I did say "good" as this doesn't apply to all movies but every good movie) is based off this true reality of good vs. evil. Again, we didn't make this up. This is life. It's what you and I are living in.

And sometimes, as we'll talk about toward the end today, we act as if that battle of good vs. evil isn't there. That the battle isn't really raging. Well, it is. And this battle of good vs. evil is raging in our hearts. That's what Jesus says today. It's in every one of your hearts. The devil wants your heart. We can't let him have it. We've got to have Jesus. And not only does he want your heart. He wants your home and your family. We've got to have someone stronger than him. We've got to have Jesus.

Is this battle not very serious? Do we understand that many of the wars that have been fought in the history of the world are this battle of good vs. evil. Sometimes the battle has actually turned violent and bloody. Read the Old Testament. Sometimes it bothers us how much violence there is in the Old Testament. Well, that is the battle of God vs. Satan, the battle of good vs. evil. It's everywhere. And that same war, even though it may not always appear to you blood and violent, is going on for your heart all the time. The battle of good vs. evil.

So today Jesus is going to teach us three things. We're taking these right out of His words. Number one, Satan is a strong man. Do not underestimate him. In fact, I'm going to give you this picture the Bible gives of Satan as a dragon. He's not someone you want to mess around with. The second point Jesus says is that He, Jesus, is a stronger man who attacks him and overcomes him. We'll talk about how Jesus defeats the devil. And our third point is going to be right out of Jesus' words, "Whoever is not with Me is against Me." There's no neutral ground in this war. You can't just say, "Well, I'm not for either side." That doesn't work. That's impossible.

So Satan is a strong foe. Don't underestimate him. Jesus is a stronger Savior. And there's no neutral ground. Those are going to be our points today.

Now how can God picture to us how strong Satan is? Satan doesn't mind if you don't think he's all that big of a deal because then he can just work behind the scenes. We've got to see how terrible of an enemy he is. So one way the Bible does this is picture Satan as a dragon. This is Revelation 12. Now we think that dragons are just stuff of fairy tales and legends and myths. Well, no, it's in the Bible. That's how God pictures Satan in Revelation 12 and in other places. Let me give you Revelation 12 (which, by the way, the hymn we just sang uses Revelation 12 where Michael fought the battle). But right before that it says, "Then I saw another sign in the heaven, a great, red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. His tail swept a third of the stars of heaven and cast them down to the earth." Now dragons, you've got to give them credit. They're terrifying. They breathe fire. If any of you have read the Hobbit, it's all about this big quest to go and rescue the treasure, the mountain, from the dragon. Satan is a dragon, a fire-breathing dragon.

Now you think you're stronger than him, right? Well, let's take a reminder. Who is the strongest man, outside of Jesus, that has ever lived? Samson. Mighty Samson. Samson, who with his bare hands, killed a lion. Samson, who with one bone of a donkey, slayed a thousand Philistines. None of us stand a chance against Samson.

But did Samson stand a chance against the devil? No, he didn't. He was beaten by Satan. Samson wasn't strong enough. All it took was Delilah whispering in his ear, "Tell me your secret." And he gave it all away to Satan. And here come the Philistines to gouge his eyes out and he's weak as a baby.

What about wise? Who's the wisest person who's ever lived outside of Jesus? King Solomon. He wrote the book of Wisdom. Wrote the Proverbs. If anyone should be able to outwit Satan it should be Solomon. But Satan got him too. Through all of his wives, Satan led him to worship all of their false gods and Solomon had a pretty hard fall too. So if we think we're stronger, let's take a check. We're not. None of us are stronger than Samson and he fell. If we think we're wiser, again look in the mirror. If Solomon fell, you're not going to stand. We're not stronger. We're not wiser. If you need anything else, let me give you one more picture. This is Job chapter 41 where God is talking to Job and He says, "Have you seen Leviathan?" Now Leviathan is the word often translated dragon. God is talking about some kind of great sea creature. It could be a whale. But I think it's some more dinosaur-like creature of the sea. God is talking about how huge Leviathan is and how he breathes fire. God says, "When Leviathan sees our spear, he laughs." That's what Satan does when we think we're going to spear him—he laughs. And all the while, he, as Jesus says, is "fully armed."

What is meant that Satan is "fully armed"? It means he is loaded with artillery and armory and ammunition all against you. He, in Ephesians 6, is said to have his flaming arrows ready to fire at you. His main weapon choice against you is lies. And this is how good the devil is, how terrible of an enemy. With his lies, he can make bad things look good to us. This is what he did with Adam and Eve. They knew it was bad to eat of that fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God told them it was bad but here comes the devil and tells them, "Oh no, it's not bad. Look, you'll be like God. Look, the fruit looks good. You'll be wise. You'll know good and evil." And they say, "Oh, yeah, well I guess it really is good." That's what Satan does. That's how strong Satan is.

This is everywhere around us. If you just think about it a bit, think about how crazy the devil works. He has convinced our nation—to me, this is one of the most appalling so I use it a lot—but he has convinced us that killing a baby in the womb is actually good. How does he do that? How can he possibly convince a whole nation that it's good and right, that it's actually going to make us better, to kill babies in the womb? That's what he's done.

Or how about in our state? Let's go a little closer to home in IL. He has convinced us lately that somehow gambling is going to be great for our state. "Oh, it's just going to do wonderful things for us, isn't it?" I read an article this week that really got me thinking about gambling, especially the sports betting. If you watched any football, or any basketball, you see all these commercials, "Oh, look how fun it is. Download the app. Let's bet on the game." Well, this article says, "I wonder if ten or fifteen years from now sports betting will be what cigarettes used to be. Where all of a sudden we'll wake up one day and we'll say, 'Wait a minute, this isn't good for anybody. Why are we doing this?'" Well, because the devil shot his arrow at us. That's what he's doing all the time.

When he can't get us with his lies, then he'll pull out his second favorite arrow which is his pleasures. So he drives us mad with the pleasures of this world whether it be alcohol, drugs, pornography, food. Whatever he can get us to abuse he will abuse us with. He is, you see, fully armed.

Finally, why else is this a strong man, a strong enemy? Because, Jesus says, he “guards his own palace and his goods are safe.” He’s got something on you that you think, that you think, you can’t get rid of. He guards his palace. He guards us with our sins and our death and our guilt and our shame. And we think we’re trapped and we’ll never get out of it because he’s got the goods on us. And how could God ever love us? How could we ever deserve to go to heaven? And Satan laughs. And he keeps us under lock and key. He’s a strong man.

But, Jesus says, when a stronger one, stronger than him, attacks him and overcomes him...not Samson, not Solomon, not you, not me...but when a stronger one, Jesus, attacks him. Jesus comes in to this world with His sword, not the worldly sword as He teaches His disciples, but the sword of the Word of God and He starts cutting away the devil’s lies. He starts at His temptation. The devil gave all these temptations and Jesus cuts at them with the Word of God. “No, it is written. It is written. It is written.” And then Jesus overcomes him.

That is a very cool word and I’m hopeful that I’ve got a way to stick this into your memory. Do you know that the word there for “overcome” when He says, “Attacks him and overcomes him,”—that Greek word is *nike*. That’s pretty helpful. I think you’re going to remember that.

When the owners and founders of the Nike company were trying to come up with a name for their company and they were throwing around names and none of them seemed right—someone said, “We ought to name it Nike.” Nike was a name for the Greek goddess of victory. All that they did was took that Greek word for victory and gave it to this goddess. But who is the real God of victory? Jesus is! Anytime you see the word Nike you think Jesus! He’s the Overcomer! The Conqueror! And his logo isn’t a swoosh sign. It’s the cross! That’s how He takes away the armor of the devil. That’s how He overcomes Him. How He *nikes* him. How He conquers him. By the blood of His cross!

He says, “Oh, devil, you’ve got the goods on them? You’ve got their sins? They’re dying? Well, I’m going to take all of that. I’m taking it all. You’ve got nothing on them anymore. My blood is going to be shed to pay for all their sins. And my resurrection is going to give them life eternal. You’ve got nothing on them anymore.” That’s how He, the real Nike, the real Victor, how He overcomes Satan and takes away his armor and divides his spoil.

And that’s the last little phrase I want to give you. “Dividing the spoil” is exactly what we’re here for today. Every Divine Service. For Jesus to divide the spoil. For Jesus to give us in His Word and Sacrament the victory. The spoils of victory—forgiveness, faith, eternal life, salvation.

One more point we have to deal with. After He teaches us this that Satan is a strong man and you shouldn’t underestimate him. And that Jesus is stronger and you find your victory in Him. Then He gives us a little warning. He says, “Whoever is not with me is against Me.” In other words, there is no neutral ground in this war.

And the reason I wanted to talk about this today is because I think this is especially an American problem right now that we think in America right now that there is some kind of a “neutral ground” in this religious stuff. A lot of Americans think, “Well, I’m not religious. I’m not anti-religion. I’m neutral. I don’t take sides in this. I don’t really care. I don’t believe any of it.” Well, you understand that it’s impossible. That doesn’t even work. Either you are with Jesus, or you are against Jesus and with Satan. There’s no neutral ground. There’s no magical place where you can stand and say, “Well, I’m not picking a side in this fight.” You’re in the fight! The fight is for your heart and for your home and for your family! You have to pick a side. And there’s only one side that you want to be on.

This whole idea of being neutral Jesus says is like “an unclean spirit leaving for a while seeking a place to rest and then comes back and finds the house is swept out and put in order.” That’s what happens when you think you’re neutral. “Oh,

no, I cleaned out all that religion stuff. I swept my heart clean." Well, a sweeping doesn't do it. Sweeping is not going to clean out the mess. The devil comes back and finds that you swept it out and he's like, "Boom! I'm coming back with seven more spirits!" And Jesus says, "The last state of that person is worse than the first." Sweeping isn't going to cut it. We need to be washed. Not swept. Washed!

The demon, Jesus says, is wandering around in "waterless" places. Waterless. Unbaptized places. But if it comes back and finds that your heart has been baptized and washed clean, "There's no room in the inn!" We need our hearts filled, cleaned, washed, and filled with the Word of God. "Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and guard it."

Before you knew Jesus, Satan was guarding your home and your heart and your family. Now that you know the Conqueror, the Victor, the Dragon-Slayer, your heart is guarded by the Word of God. By the Holy Spirit.

You may not realize this but to close I want to remind you that you pray about this every time you say the Lord's Prayer. You are praying this battle of good and evil. You start out and you say, "My Father who is in heaven, I want to be on Your side. Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done. I want to be with the Conqueror. With the Victor. With Jesus Christ." That's how we start that prayer. Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done.

And then, after we ask for our daily things, then we ask for our forgiveness. That God would take away the armor of Satan. That He would divide the spoil. Forgive our sins. And then, deliver us from evil. When Luther, in the Small Catechism, talks about that one he says, "What does this mean?" "We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us." See the word there again, "guard", that God would guard our hearts and our homes so that "the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh may not deceive us or mislead us in to false belief, despair, and other great shame and vice. Although we are attacked by these things..." And you will be attacked every day. By the arrows of the strong one Satan, that dragon. "Although we are attacked by these things we pray we may finally overcome them and win the victory!"

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

