



***“Dragons and Dragon Slayers”***

**June 21, 2009**

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1971 was a time of social upheaval in an America polarized by the Vietnam War. The peace sign was being flashed by hippies and pacifists everywhere, but there was no peace in the land.

During that turbulent year, Hollywood legend Sam Peckinpah gave the nation one of the most disturbing movies ever produced. It was called *Strawdogs*. Its violence was so chilling and brutal that four decades later, it is still banned in Great Britain. It created a fire-storm of controversy between pacifist doves and pro-war hawks in America.

That's exactly what Sam Peckinpah wanted.

*Strawdogs* was adapted from a bestselling novel, *The Siege of Trencher's Farm* about an American college professor, David Summers, a mild-mannered mathematician who is running away from the violence in America. He moves with his wife Amy to an old farmhouse in the English countryside. Summers will go to any length to avoid confrontation. His unfulfilled and bored wife sees him as a powerless, absurd figure of a man.

The professor hires several crude bully boys from the local village to fix up his old farmhouse. Ignored by her husband, who spends his day buried in mathematical equations, Amy relieves her boredom by flirting shamelessly with the hired help.

The raunchy village boys drag out their repair job as long as possible to cheat the yank out of more money. Summers knows they are taking advantage of him, but refuses to confront them. He knows there is a growing magnetism between his wife and one of those hooligans, but he retreats further into his safe world of mathematics. The village boys laugh at him, and Amy despises him all the more for his lack of manliness.

The evil that has been brewing under the surface now explodes into violence. A combination of Amy's flirting and Dr. Summer's passivity emboldens the village boys. They brutally slaughter a rabbit, hang it in the bedroom closet, and giggle outside the house while Amy screams hysterically. A few days later, one of them violates Amy. She keeps the ugly secret from her husband, but is bitter that he ignores her bruises and tears.

Events spin out of control. The village boys come in the dark of night to finish off the Summers. The passive professor knows that this is now a fight to the death. His pacifism will not survive the night of terror. In this moment of truth, he somehow finds his manhood. Frantically, he runs from room to room trying to block doors and board up windows, firing a shotgun at one opening while swinging an ax or scythe at another. Gore and carnage are everywhere, but Summers fights on in a frenzy until all the village boys have been killed or have fled. Exhausted and covered with blood, he whispers through raspy voice, "I will not allow violence against my home!"

In the film *Strawdogs*, Sam Peckinpah poses hard questions to a nation wrestling with Vietnam and anti-war demonstrations. Those questions are just as relevant some forty years later. Can pacifism stand in the face of evil? Will evil go away if it is ignored? If you don't war against evil when it is small, will you be forced to fight to the death when it has grown into a monster?

*Strawdogs* is a great allegory of spiritual warfare. Like Amy, we often flirt with evil only to see it become a stalking predator. Or, like Dr. Summers, we passively allow evil to worm its way insidiously into our life.

On this Father's Day it's important to remember that Adam watched in passive silence while the serpent seduced his wife. Afraid of confrontation, too many of us remain silent while our loved ones are ensnared. Tragically, "the day of evil" catches us by surprise. We are suddenly scurrying about in a frantic fight for our lives because forces of evil have broken through our unguarded doors and windows.

Sam Peckinpah is right: pacifism will not stand up to the day of evil. Some things are worth fighting for well before the day of evil comes. St. Paul says in Ephesians 6:13, "Put on the whole armor of God so that when the day of evil comes you can take your stand." But, it's not enough to fight passionately. We must also fight wisely. When the snake becomes a dragon we are incapable of beating it. If we are going to win battles ahead, we must grab hold of the fifth principle of spiritual warfare:

### **Only a dragon slayer can ever slay a dragon.**

There are many descriptions of Satan, but none as frightening as St. John's in Revelation 12:3: "...an enormous red dragon with seven heads, and ten horns, and seven crowns on his heads." John uses the most graphic imagery to describe this enraged dragon that wars against the followers of Christ.

Martin Luther faced this ferocious dragon. In his hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, he wrote, "...for still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe. His wrath and power are great, and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal." Such a dragon is beyond our power to defeat. Luther's great hymn goes on, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing." Only a dragon slayer can slay a dragon like this. St. John sees him in Revelation 19:7: "And I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war..." Martin Luther continues in his hymn of triumph: "Were on our side, the man of God's own choosing. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is he. Lord Sabaoth his name--from age to age the same, and he must win the battle."

When King Jesus comes out of heaven on his white horse to fight the dragon and his armies, the saints will ride behind him on their war horses. But only Jesus has a sword. Revelation 19 says that he alone strikes down the nations. If we want to be battle ready, there are three areas where we need to rely on the dragon slayer:

### **1. Watch out for those *delectable delights*.**

The devil knows how to appeal to our carnal desires. How does Satan get inside our souls? There are three gateways according to 1 John 5:15&16,

“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boastings of what he has and does—comes not from the Father, but from the world.”

#### **1) An appeal to our *eyes***

1 John 2:15 warns us about “...the lust of the eyes...” In the words of an ancient Jewish saying, “The eyes are the gateway to our soul.” The Roman philosopher Cicero penned these words:

“The eyes are sentinels that warn us when danger approaches. In that regard, they hold the highest place in the body. But when our eyes are beguiled and seduced, they allow all manner of evil to gain entrance to our soul. In that sense, they are traitors to the body.”

When Dan Rather asked Bill Clinton about his affair with Monica Lewinski, the President replied, “I couldn’t keep my eyes from wandering.” Satan always tempts the eyes first. Genesis 3:4 says that Eve “...saw the fruit was pleasing to the eye...” The forbidden fruit dangled from the most attractive tree in the Garden of Eden. An old English proverb says, “What the eye does not admire, the heart does not desire.” The Puritan Thomas Carlyle warns us, “Weak eyes are fondest of glittering objects.”

Never has a generation been so susceptible to this temptation. Our eyes are bombarded with sensory overload in a media age. Ravi Zacharias says, “This is the first generation to hear with its eyes.” A media executive once bragged to me, “We produce eye candy for the sweet tooth of the imagination.” More than ever we need to guard our eyes.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, he appealed to his eyes. We read in Matthew 4:8, “The devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor.” Like Eve, Jesus was shown the beauty of forbidden fruit. Satan enticed him: “If you fall down and worship me, I will give you all these splendid kingdoms.”

But Jesus did not let his eyes seduce him. Truth trumped sensory perception. For that reason alone, we need to see with the eyes of Jesus.

## 2) An appeal to the *appetite*

We hunger for all kinds of things. Pop singer Madonna said, “Some people are hungry for food. I’m hungry for sex, money, and power.” In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine talked about “the insatiable hunger of the restless soul.” Hunger is a good thing if we hunger for righteousness. But our misplaced hunger is the devil’s snare. I John 2:16 says that the devil’s second entry point to our soul is “the cravings of sinful man.” We read in Genesis 3:6, “The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food.” When the devil came to Jesus in the wilderness, our Lord had gone 40 days without food. He was ravenously hungry. It’s at that point that Satan said, in Matthew 4:3, “If you are the son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

Our age presents a buffet table of pleasures. Social critic John Lahr put it best: “Society drives people crazy with lust and calls it advertising.” Eva Peron once said, “Most of the world eats to live. We Argentines live to eat.” She could say the same thing about us Americans. But Jesus was able to control his appetites, and he can control ours too—if we let him. The Roman statesman Seneca said, “A well-governed appetite is the great price of liberty.” Here’s a good bit of advice from Benjamin Franklin: “Eat for necessity, not pleasure, for lust knows not where necessity ends.” Satan knows what you are hungry for today. I hope you do too, and are on guard—for it is at the point of your cravings that he sets his traps.

## 3) An appeal to *pride*

1 John 2:16 says that the third entry point to our soul is *boasting* and *pride*. Satan appealed to Eve’s pride in Genesis 3:5 by promising, “...your eyes will be opened and you will be like God...” Genesis 3:6 continues, “...the woman saw that the fruit was...desirable for gaining wisdom.” He did the same thing to Jesus in the wilderness temptation. Matthew 4:5&6 says that he took our Lord to the top of the temple and said, “If you are God, throw yourself off, and command your angels to catch you.” But Jesus responds, “No one (not even me) should tempt God.” In other words, “I won’t play God.” But we are all tempted to play God. We do well to remember the words of St. Augustine: “It was pride that changed angels into devils, and it is humility that makes men as angels.” Where does pride have its hold in your life? Watch out! Grab hold of Jesus and let him slay those dragons.

## 2. Watch out for *discontent*.

Discontent was at the heart of Lucifer’s fall. He was not satisfied to be the most beautiful of angels. He also wanted the throne of heaven. Adam and Eve had the whole Garden of Eden except for a single tree of forbidden fruit,

but they would not be satisfied until they had that, too. Discontent is at the heart of all sin. The only truly contented person to ever walk the face of this earth was our Lord Jesus Christ. Watch out for discontent...

### 1) With what we *have*

The woman said in Genesis 3:2&3, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say we could not eat from the tree that is in the middle of the garden." It was only *one* tree out of thousands, but it was the *one* thing that they couldn't have. And that one thing drove them crazy.

You can lavish your children with everything their little hearts desire, but tell them they can't have that *one* thing—it will be that one thing that consumes their desires. They will pout and whine until they get it. Sadly, we don't change when we get older. You may be liked by a thousand people. But it's that *one* person who doesn't like you that drives you crazy. It's the *one* friendship that you can't have that you want most. St. Augustine wrote, "Forbidden fruit always tastes best." Madison Avenue knows our hearts. They spend billions of advertising to spend money we don't have to buy things we don't need to impress people who don't really care. One of Satan's most powerful weapons is "the myth of the greener grass."

### 2) With *who* we are

The Serpent seduced Eve with these words in Genesis 3:5, "God knows in the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God." When God first saw Eve he said, "It is very good." God had defined her as perfect in his eyes. But now the devil comes and redefines her. Now she has doubts about herself. In effect he is saying, "Maybe you aren't as wise as you thought. If you eat the forbidden fruit you will be wiser than you are." In short, he is telling her she isn't quite good enough. I wonder if she began to think, "If I'm not wise enough, maybe I'm not beautiful enough either.?" Satan plays the same games with us. Some of you grew up hearing the lies from your parents. Maybe they told you that you weren't good enough, or smart enough, or pretty enough. Or perhaps the kids at school put you down and made you feel like a loser. Or a thousand media presentations of what the *really* beautiful people should look like have made you feel too fat, or too skinny, or too poor, or too plain, or too old. Understand this: it is the "Father of Lies" who is behind all those images that have made you doubt your own value and beauty as God's special creation.

He even tried it with Jesus in the wilderness temptations. Two times he says to Jesus, "If you really are the Son of God..." He tries to plant the seed of doubt in Christ. But Jesus didn't have to prove he's *somebody* to others. He didn't have to validate his value by trying to measure up to the standards set by the devil or anyone else. He knew exactly who he was as the bearer of his Father's image. He knew that he really was God the Son and he didn't

have to do tricks for others to prove the point. Neither do those of us who know who we are in Christ. How much heartache, how many sins, and how much energy we would save if we rested in our identity in Christ.

### **3) With what *others* are**

Satan said to Eve in Genesis 3:2, “Did God really say..?” He tried to drive a wedge between the woman and her Creator by questioning whether they really understood each other. He spins more doubt in verse five: “God knows when you eat the forbidden fruit you will be wise like him.” Do you see the insidious slander: “God is withholding wisdom by keeping the best fruit out of your hands, and preventing you from being all you can be.”?

He also lures Eve away from her husband. He gets her to strike out on her own. Immediately he plants the seeds of division. Adam becomes the passive male who stands silently by while Eve assumes spiritual leadership that’s not hers to take. When it’s all over, the man cries out to God, “The woman you gave me is the cause of all my problems.” It is the beginning of the battle of the genders, and a foreshadowing of racism, sexism, ageism, tribalism, nationalism, elitism, and all the other things that divide people.

The most devastating spiritual warfare is fought on the battleground of relationships. Most churches and Christian ministries are destroyed because people can’t get along or refuse to resolve conflicts in biblical manners. People become discontented with their husbands and wives, parents and children, and brothers and sisters. Yet Jesus loved the weak, unattractive, and hard-to-get-along-with. Discontent—whether it is with circumstances, yourself, or others—is the devil’s playground. .

### **3. Watch out for Doubt.**

The greatest deceit is to get us to doubt the truth. Both in the Garden of Eden and the wilderness temptation of Jesus, doubt was a powerful weapon.

#### **1) Doubting God’s Word**

Again the words of Genesis 3:1: “Did God really say...” Satan only changed God’s Word a little bit. But a little bit is all it takes for deception to work its black magic. Three times in the wilderness Jesus tempts Jesus by twisting and misquoting Scripture. He still uses the same bag of tricks with us: “Did God really say...?” In an age when moral absolutes are viewed as intolerant, and feelings trump objective facts, we cannot afford to fall into the trap of political correctness. If we doubt the authority of the Bible, the battle is already lost. If we are functionally illiterate when it comes to biblical knowledge, we will fall for anything. If we say that we believe the Bible, but compromise it when the chips are down, we are dead meat for the roaring lion who seeks to destroy us. If we say we believe it, but in the name of “getting along” we don’t stand for truth, like Dr. Summers we will be fighting for our very lives in a night of terror when the village boys come for

the kill. Never forget the words of Edwin Hubble Chaplin: "Neutral men are the devil's allies." Like Jesus, we must never doubt God's Word.

## 2) Doubting God's love

Satan's main argument in his seduction of Eve is that God has withheld his best from her. In short, God didn't really love her. As a result, she couldn't trust him anymore. So she took matters into her own hands. I've watched all kinds of "control freaks" in my life. Most of us are consumed with controlling our own environment. What's at the core of our anxiety? The truth is: we doubt God's love. Maybe we've been disappointed or betrayed too many times. We are constantly waiting for the other shoe to drop. This is tough, but true nonetheless: whenever we are anxiety-ridden, or trying to control our environment, or filled with bitterness and disillusionment, or unforgiving toward those who have disappointed us, it is because, at our very core, we doubt God's love. The devil is lurking in the shadows of such unbelief. It is only when we love our Father, the way Jesus loved him, that we can say with our Lord, "Not my will, but yours be done."

## 3) Doubting ourselves

Eve thought she needed the forbidden fruit to make herself better. Adam doubted his ability to lead, so he stood passively by. Before she overdosed on drugs, Marilyn Monroe said to Peter Lawford, "I have never felt like I was beautiful enough, or smart enough, or good enough to be loved by anyone." And Satan was standing in the shadows with a bottle of pills. All the children of Adam and Eve have the same seed of insecurity. For some of us it has become a jungle of self-doubt and insecurity. At the root of self-doubt is the fact that we doubt God's love for us because we doubt the truth of his Word. Sure we are messed-up sinners. But God loved us enough to send his Only Begotten Son to redeem us. He paid an awesome price to do so. If we belong to him, we are a new creation. We are destined for glory. We are in the process of being remade. We aren't what we want to be, or are going to be, but we are more than we used to be. Our best days are always ahead of us. There is a dragon that I call, "I'm never good enough." Jesus is here to slay that dragon by saying, "Of course you're never good enough. But you don't have to be. I'm good enough for you."

We cannot afford to sit passively by while the *Strawdogs* of hell insidiously worm their way into our lives. On this Father's Day, I believe that God is calling us, in the words of the old hymn, "Rise up O Men of God...be done with lesser things..." Sam Peckinpah was right: passivity cannot stand against evil. If we go with the flow, the lazy river will eventually become a raging torrent that sweeps us over a waterfall of destruction. But the battle is not in our own strength. Martin Luther was right when he wrote, "...our striving would be losing..." Thank God for the dragon slayer who lives in you, who covers you, and who ultimately is your armor.