

They Lie In Wait For My Life

A Sermon by Rev. Donald L. Rose

"All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather together, they hide, they mark my steps, when they lie in wait for my life" (Psalm 56:6).

There was a shepherd boy, strong and handsome. The meaning of his name is "beloved." The name is David. The shepherd boy was destined to become king, destined to live a life of great adventure.

It was a life repeatedly attended with mortal danger. There were dangers that he was aware of. They were clear enough: danger from a lion and a bear; danger from a giant named Goliath; danger from hosts of Philistines with swords and spears.

But there were other dangers, more subtle but very real. And if he had not been told about those dangers, his life would have been short indeed. What we see happening in the story of David is his being warned of such dangers, particularly being warned about the intentions of King Saul. Saul was his king, his protector, his benefactor, and beneath it all his deadly enemy. Jonathan, David's dear friend, saved his life by warning him. And David's wife Michal warned David one night when the house was surrounded, saying, "If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed" (I Sam. 19:11).

Two of the psalms were composed at a time when David had learned that his life was in peril. Psalm 59 was composed that night when Michal revealed Saul's plot and when David knew that he was in a house surrounded by those ready to kill him. The psalm begins as follows: "Deliver me from my enemies, O my God. Defend me from those who rise up against me ... For look, they lie in wait for life ... Not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord."

Another psalm was written when David had sought refuge in Gath but there found that people were talking about him and planning to kill him. "Now David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath" (I Sam. 21:12). Because he knew of the danger he was in, he was able to pretend madness and make his escape. The fear he felt before he made that escape is evident in the psalm which he then composed. But infinitely more is contained in the psalm, for it is the Word of God. In it David says, "All day they twist my words; all their

thoughts are against me for evil. They gather, they hide, they mark my steps when they lie in wait for my life" (Psalm 56:5, 6).

The psalms sometimes portray man as under siege. He is in a predicament, surrounded by dangers and anxieties and fears. The psalms continually speak of "enemies." Man is portrayed as being the object of threat and hatred. What is the reality? The Writings say that an incredible "intense hatred" prevails in the spiritual world against things relating to love and faith in the Lord. In fact they say that unless the Lord defended a person every moment he would perish as a result of this hatred (see AC 59). Jesus warned His disciples, "You shall be hated" (Matt. 10:27, Mark 13:13).

In our lesson from Divine Providence 211, we read that Divine Providence is like a person "in company with an enemy who intends to kill him which at the time he does not know, and a friend leads him away by unknown paths, and afterward discloses his enemy's intention."

When we say that a person is his own worst enemy, we are usually talking about a person who does not know is not aware of his problem. If only the person realized how much he or she is sabotaging his or her own happiness. It is not easy for another person to get the message across. To do it takes patience and tact and real caring. In the Divine Providence in time we learn about the things in our lives which we thought were our friends, which are our enemies. We walk through life with some loves which do a lot for us, just as Saul did a lot for David. There are many examples, such as a pride that has us taking credit and basking in the warmth of self-merit, even thinking that taking credit and bragging can be a source of happiness. If we think that, we have a lot to learn, and we may learn it very slowly through many experiences.

The Lord said, "A man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:36). Our own evils, as dear to us as the inhabitants of our house, can be the foes of which the Word warns us.

But there is another sense in which we are in danger. The danger is from outside the house; it surrounds the house. We mean those forces from hell which intend us harm. The evil spirits who associate with us can stir up the evils within us.

There is a chapter in the book Heaven and Hell that is entitled "The Malice and Nefarious Arts of Infernal Spirits" (HH 576). In it we learn

that evil spirits are subtle and devious, and we learn that they have a malice, that is, that they intend harm. "All their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather, they hide, they mark my steps, when they lie in wait for my life" (Ps. 56:5, 6). The teaching is that "so far as anyone is innocent they burn to do him harm; therefore they cannot bear to see little children, and as soon as they see them they are inflamed with a cruel desire to do them harm" (HH 283).

What are some of the things they endeavor to do? They are in a constant endeavor to dissolve marriages (see HH 382). They endeavor to stir up enmities. They lead a person into thoughts about himself (see HH 558a). Indeed, by leading a person into thoughts about himself, they can stir up those enmities. We read, "There is a certain kind of spirits, who ... stir up enmities, hatreds, and fights among others. I have seen the consequent fights and wondered at them. I inquired who they were, and was told that they were that kind of spirits who excite such passions because they are bent on being sole rulers, according to the maxim, Divide and rule" (AC 5718). "Wondered" at them. Do you ever wonder at the fights you observe, or have you ever stood back far enough from the fights in which you have been involved to wonder at them?

We will return to that word "divide" in a moment, because the effort of evil spirits is to tear asunder, to dissolve, and to divide so that they can rule.

The effort of evil spirits is to destroy happiness. One way they do this is to accuse. They stir up memories of anything that one has done wrong, and they even take innocent memories and turn them into subjects of accusation. "They call up all the wrong things that from his infancy a man has either done or even thought ... and condemn him" (AC 741). "They call forth from a person's memory whatever he has thought and done from his infancy. Evil spirits do this with a skill and malignity so great as to be indescribable ... This a person perceives "only by the recalling of such things to mind and a certain anxiety there from" (AC 751).

The word in the New Testament that is related to worry or anxiety is the word merimnao. Its root connotation is dividing. The root word to "divide" is merizo. It is used in the saying, "If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand" (Mark 3:25, Matt. 12:25, Luke 11:17).

The Writings mention an old maxim, "Divide and rule" (see AC 5718, SD 1793, TCR 133e). There are spheres that can affect us inwardly that can divide things in our minds. We read of spheres which pose blocks in our minds between faith and charity. We read in TCR: "I have felt this sphere, and at such times, when I thought of the conjunction of faith and charity, it interposed itself between them and violently endeavored to separate them" (TCR 619:6).

An experience described in the Arcana Coelestia seems a little closer to what we experience.

"The effect of this sphere was to take from me the power of close application, and to make it so irksome for me to act and to think in serious matters, true and good, that at last I scarcely knew what to do. When such as these come among spirits, they induce on them a similar torpor" (AC 1509).

Does this relate to times when we just can't make decisions of what to do or to times when we simply procrastinate and seem somehow unable to do the thing that most needs doing? Here is the same passage in more recent translation: "Their sphere was such that it took away from me my whole concentration and made it so extremely troublesome for me to carry out and to think about serious things, true and good, that at length I hardly knew what to do. When such individuals as these come among spirits, they bring upon them a similar listlessness" (AC 1509). There is a word used particularly in psychiatry which describes an inability to get started doing something or to decide what to do. The word is "abulia."

If the core of happiness is in useful activity, then we are not surprised if the enemies of our happiness in various ways cripple our application to use. If they endeavor to harm innocence, to dissolve marriages, and to stir up fights among friends, they will undermine our love of use. Idleness is said to be "the devil's pillow" (Charity 168). For, "In idleness the mind is spread out to various evils and falsities, but in work it is held to one thing" (SD 6088:4).

In the book Conjugial Love there is a chapter on causes of cold in marriage. One of the causes given is a lack of devotion to any useful pursuit or business. Here we read,

"While a man is in some pursuit and business, that is, in some use, his mind is bounded and circumscribed as by a circle, within which it is successively integrated into a form truly human. From this as from a house he sees the various lusts as outside of himself, and from sanity of reason within, banishes them" (CL 249).

Any focus we have on what is useful is like a house, a house in which we can find comfort and from which we can view life with good perspective. If you know that your purpose in life is to promote the happiness of others, you look out upon the world with a sane perspective and with some taste of heaven's delight.

The text from the psalms seems to picture one looking out from a house threatened with dangers. "They hide, they mark my steps, when they lie in wait for my life." Does the knowledge that there are dangers make us feel less secure? Do we get a paranoid attitude, a persecution complex, from the knowledge that evil spirits would divide our house, would dissolve our marriages and interfere with our delight in use?

Well, the context of statements about this is not a fearful one, but rather one that has a special sense of security. We are reminded of the Lord's saying, "In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). The Lord said, "Blessed are you when men hate you" (Luke 6:22). "Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you, and say all kind of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad" (Matt. 5:11).

Let us conclude with one example from the Writings and one from the Psalms. In the Arcana Coelestia we read:

"I have sometimes been surrounded by thousands to whom it was permitted to spit forth their venom, and infest me by all possible methods, yet without their being able to hurt a single hair of my head, so secure was I under the Lord's protection" (AC 59).

And in the Psalms it is said, "I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around" (Ps. 3:6).

There are indeed dangers and threats that surround us. Let the knowledge of this make us value all the more what we have. And let us, if we know there is a danger, always know at the same time that we have a Divine Protector. This is the reality of our lives. The passages

about our enemies shows them turned backward, confounded, defeated and subjugated.

We have a shield, a rock, a fortress, a shepherd who prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies, the Lord Jesus Christ who says,

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you ... If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:19, 20).

"In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Amen.

*Lessons: I Samuel 19:1-18, 21:10-15, Matt. 10:22-39, AC 5718, 1509,
DP 211*