

# Know Your Enemy

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 19 May 2024

Preacher: Mike Scrivani

[ 0 : 00 ] Turn in your Bible to Ezra chapter 4, verses 1 through 5 will be our text for this morning.

! If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the pews that you may use. If you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home as a gift from our church to you and our hopes that you'll continue to be reading and blessed by the reading of God's Word. Ezra chapter 4, verses 1 through 5, and if you're there, would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together.

Now, when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord, the God of Israel, they approached Zerubbabel and the heads of father's houses and said to them, let us build with you, for we worship your God as you do, and we have been sacrificing to him ever since the days of Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, who brought us here. But Zerubbabel, Yeshua, and the rest of the heads of father's houses in Israel said to them, you have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God, but we alone will build to the Lord, the God of Israel, as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us. Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counselors against them to frustrate their purpose all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius, king of Persia. And in the reign of Esarhaddon, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem. They got out a blessing to the reading of his Word. Would you please be seated? When I was a kid in our neighborhood growing up, elementary school aged, we loved to be outside. We would play baseball, basketball, football, ride our bicycles, you name it. We loved being outside and playing, but when it rained, we were forced to be indoors, and we were forced outside, or inside, excuse me. What we would do is we would play a board game, and the game that we most often played was the game of risk, the game of global domination. And man, we tried to win. But here's the problem for us. Me and my best friend, we were the same age. Well, he had an older brother who was smart, and he was much smarter than we were, and he always won. And so what we would do, it would rain, we'd put out the risk board. You know, there's usually like four of us, and we would start playing, and it was clear that he was probably going to win yet again. And then whenever, you know, the rain broke and we were able to go outside, we would leave, and we would leave the board where it was. And then we would just come back to the board and to the game whenever it rained. Well, me and my best friend, we would get together when it was not raining, and we would talk about risk, and we would talk about his brother, and we would talk about how we needed to plot together and scheme together. We needed to form an alliance and beat him no matter what it took.

I didn't live in their house, but my friend did. And so part of our plotting and our scheming was for him to secretly go to the place where the risk board was and remove pieces off of the board so that we could win. But again, I told you, his brother was smart, and he had like a photographic memory, and he would come in, and he would see the board, and he would know you guys removed pieces off of the board, and he would put them back. The other thing is he had the rule book memorized. So anytime we would try to do anything that was not according to the rules, he would make sure to let us know, and he would show us in the rule book where it was located, that instruction, and that we were wrong. Our plotting and our scheming, no matter how hard we tried, never seemed to work. At this point in Ezra, the people of God have suffered a setback. They worked together to lay the foundation of the temple that the

[ 4 : 38 ] Babylonians had destroyed. This was a great moment. They were obedient to God in their return. They pursued the same purpose together to reconstruct the temple, to reinstate worship of God in that sacred place. But chapter 3 does not end on a joyful note. Though the physical foundation for the new temple was whole, the spiritual foundation of the people began to fracture. Many of them had never seen the temple, the temple that existed before it was destroyed. And so

they celebrated the laying of its foundation with joy in anticipation of the future as they would continue to pursue God's plan.

But there were many of the returnees who remembered the old temple, and the size of the new foundation revealed that it wasn't going to be as glorious as the first. And they wept and they mourned for the good old days. It's hard to move forward with people who are stuck in the past. That's where we left off last time in Ezra with an internal conflict. Now in chapter 4, an external conflict is added, which makes matters worse for this group that was off to such a great start. It's not a coincidence that this external conflict just so happens to come at a time when the people are vulnerable, again, due to their internal conflict. Though he isn't mentioned here by name, we know from Scripture that the one causing all of this destruction and fanning these conflicts into flame is Satan. His name literally means, Satan literally means adversary or one who opposes. He is God's enemy. He is our enemy. From the very beginning, he has sought to separate people from God, their creator. He does this by distorting the truth that

God reveals. He seeks to discourage people from pursuing God's will, to distort their focus and blind their eyes so that they wander in darkness or retreat in fear instead of pursuing the will of God and God's plan for their lives. 1 Peter 5.8 warns, be sober-minded, be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Ephesians 6.11 encourages us, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. Satan has many schemes. But God has given us His Word, as we read in 2 Corinthians 2.11, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs. From the very beginning,

Satan has schemed and challenged God's Word. The first words that the Bible records Satan speaking come in the form of a question, an attack on God's Word. He said, did God really say to Eve in the garden?

With those words, he invited her to reconsider what she understood about what God had said. He invited her to add her own interpretation. She was convinced by him that God's Word was too restrictive, as did Adam. And Satan still uses that scheme today, and Christians, churches, denominations have been devoured by it. Thinking or asking questions that the Bible clearly answers. Like, did God really say that marriage is between a man and a woman? Or did God really say that there are only two genders? Or did God really say that hell is a real place? By inviting us to add our own interpretation, Satan encourages us to nullify the clearly stated truth we find in the Word that God has given to us. Another of Satan's schemes is to challenge our identity. Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where there he fasted for 40 days. And seeing that Jesus and his humanity was physically weak, Satan pounced. He challenged Jesus' true identity as he tempted him. Twice he said, if you are the Son of God.

[ 10 : 04 ] Satan does the same with us. He strikes during times of weakness. He strikes during times of crisis. And he whispers things like this, if you were a child of God, this wouldn't happen. If you were truly a Christian, God would help you right now. If God really existed and if he really loved you, then all of the problems that you had, they would just go away. In addition to these schemes, Satan also schemes to cause us to compromise our convictions as Christians. When Satan tempted Jesus, he offered to give him all the kingdoms of the world without having to bear a cross. He targeted again Jesus' humanity. In other words, he was saying to him, maybe you can still save the world without having to suffer at all. Satan knows he can't come at mature believers with a frontal attack, so he often hides in the shadows, posing as a friend with reasonable alternatives. Like, yes, it is technically wrong for you to move in with your boyfriend or girlfriend, but you know, think of all the more witnessing opportunities that you'll have with them in that situation, and they're probably going to marry you anyways. What's wrong with that? Or, you don't need to go to church. You connect with God better when you're alone in the woods just enjoying his creation. And those people are hypocrites anyways. You have more to teach them than they have to teach you. Satan is always scheming, attacking when he sees vulnerability, seeking to cause us to compromise our convictions and exchange the truth of God for a lie. And such is the case in Ezra 4, 1 through 5.

Satan employs Samaritans as his instruments to oppose God's people. They are his men to do his bidding as he lurks in the background, hidden from sight, in the hopes that the Lord's servants would forget all about him and maybe even take out their frustration on God. As we focus on obeying God, we must also understand why the devil is our adversary and how to handle or how to resist his attacks. You know, Satan could use something like the tornado and the damage that it's

done in our building to divide us. He uses many things, anything that can give him a foothold. Maybe the older people in Ezra had thought, good, you know, I'm glad that we're not proceeding with this building any longer because it will never be as good as the original. And maybe the younger people in Ezra chapter 4 thought, you know, it's not really even worth trying because no matter what we do, we'll never measure up to the past. As a fallen angel, Satan seeks to destroy whatever is good. And his aim here as elsewhere is to thwart God's plan, to wreck God's design, to rob him of glory and portray himself as conqueror and king. But here's something that you need to know, and it's something that you must believe. It's something that Satan doesn't want you to know, and it's certainly something that if you do know it, he wants you to forget as much as possible. And that's this, that he's defeated. He is defeated.

He's a loser. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, crushed his head. Satan is a loser. Satan has lost. But that hasn't stopped him from spreading the delusion that he is a winner and that he is to be feared more than God. I think of Hollywood and movies. Every year, especially in October, there's another movie comes out about some kind of demonic possession, isn't there? And people watch those movies and they're terrified of them because they portray, you know, evil, and that's what they celebrate. But they also, in the end, portray Satan as this powerful, mighty, almost omnipotent being, that there's nothing that we can do to defeat him.

That's what Satan likes to do, present himself not as a loser, but as a winner. He lurks in the shadows where he schemes to thwart God's plans, and he does so by duping God's people into compromising their convictions. A person, a church who ignores this reality will do so to their peril. We must be alert. You must be alert to Satan's schemes. The main idea for this morning's sermon is that God's people must be aware of Satan's schemes which impede the pursuit of his will.

[15:42] God's people must be aware of Satan's schemes which impede their pursuit of his will. Why is this important? Well, as a believer, it's important because you don't want to be duped, do you, into being one of Satan's pawns that he ends up using to disrupt the work of God in your life, in your home, in your church? Jesus said to us, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness.

Satan wants you to do anything but that, and he wants anything other than that to be the top priority in your life. As an unbeliever, this is extremely important for you as well, because Satan's ultimate scheme is to keep you from truth, to keep you from salvation, to keep you from faith in Jesus Christ, and he will do anything. And he has done a lot already in your life to distract you from that truth, the truth that you most need to hear and believe to be saved. And so I hope that you'll listen and that this will help you no matter what the case, because Satan is always scheming, and we need to be on our guard against him. Our text today reveals two of the schemes Satan uses to impede our pursuit of God's will. It also provides us with the truth we need to resist falling prey to these schemes. The first scheme we see in verses 1 through 3, and that is the scheme of infiltration. Infiltration, planting frauds amongst the faithful. Verse 1 again says, Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the returned exiles were building a temple to the Lord the God of Israel. So news of the rebuilding project reached those living around the region of Jerusalem, and they sent a delegation to the city to visit the reconstruction project, and to visit with those who were overseeing the work. Now this isn't always the case, but sometimes it is. When you move to a new neighborhood, the first neighbor who greets you is probably the neighbor who is going to be the least neighborly to you. Have you ever experienced that before? It's a sort of way that they try to control the block, the neighborhood, and you who now live in their territory. They want to establish that they are the boss of the block. They know everyone, and they see everything in the neighborhood. And the first time your grass is too long, or your leaves aren't picked up, or your dog barks too loud, they're going to be the one to let you know, or they're going to call the police, and they're going to be the ones to let you know. Now that's not always the case, but sometimes it is. Interestingly, in seminary, I had a professor tell us as students that our first Sunday, as a new pastor in a church, the person, he said, who asks you out to lunch first is probably the person that you're going to have the most problems with as long as you're there. I don't remember who asked me out to lunch the first Sunday here. It's been long enough. But what he was telling us is they do that because they want to have influence over you. They want to be the first one in your ear to tell you everything that's wrong and that you need to fix or that you need to whatever cause they want you to champion. In a way, that's what this delegation was out to do. This event happened years before Ezra wrote about it, and he identifies them as adversaries. In verse 2, he explains that they were people forced to resettle in the land during the reign of the

Assyrian king Esarhaddon. So how did these returnees, how did the Jews know that this group of Samaritans was up to no good? Why were they so suspicious? To understand why the returning Jews were so unfriendly to their neighbors at this point, we need to understand the history that preceded this meeting between these people. In 722 BC, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V invaded the northern kingdom of Israel and quickly conquered most of the territory except for the capital city of Samaria because it was so well fortified and stocked with supplies. And so for three years, they laid siege to this city. And when it finally fell, the Samaritans were taken into exile and the [ 20 : 57 ] Assyrians replaced them with other people from other lands that they had conquered. And those foreign settlers settled into Samaria and they intermarried with some of the Jews, the Israelites, who still were living in the land and their descendants became known as Samaritans. These Samaritans did not fear God.

And as a result, the Bible tells us that God disciplined them. And the form of discipline He used was lions. He sent lions into the land which killed many of them. The people recognized at that point that this was the God of this land acting out against them for their sins or for their ignoring Him.

And so 2 Kings 17, 27 through 28 records the Assyrians' response to this crisis. There it says, Then the king of Assyria commanded, Send there one of the priests whom you carried away from there, and let him go and dwell there, and teach them the law of the God of the land. So one of the priests whom they had carried away from Samaria came and lived in Bethel and taught them how they should fear the Lord. The Samaritans embraced this priest and they embraced the worship rituals that he taught them, but that didn't stop them from worshiping the other gods that they had been worshiping.

And we read as we continue in 2 Kings 17, 41, So these nations feared the Lord and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise and their children's children all as their fathers did, and so they do to this day. One thing we understand from reading the Bible is that God God will be first and only in our lives, will He not? You cannot have it both ways, which the Samaritans thought they could. The Samaritans were practicing something we call religious syncretism. Syncretism is the process by which aspects of one religion are assimilated into or blended with another religion. And this leads to fundamental changes in both religions. For example, I hear a lot of Christians talk about karma. Karma is a theological concept found in Buddhist and Hindu religions. It is the belief that how you live your present life will determine the quality of life you will have in your next life after you are reincarnated. You will either be rewarded or you will be punished in your next life based upon how you've lived your current life. I once heard a Christian man who was from India, and he gave his testimony. When he was young, he developed polio, and he lost the use of his legs.

[ 24 : 11 ] He spent the rest of his life in a wheelchair. He was eight or nine years old when he contracted polio. And he was told as an eight or nine-year-old boy that you have polio as a result of punishment for sins that you committed in another life. And he talked about how painful and how confusing it was to be told that he was to be told that he was to be punished for a life that he had no recollection of living.

Yes, the Bible talks about the principle of reaping and sowing, but that is not the same as karma. You live one life, and then comes the judgment. And there are other forms of syncretism in our world, most commonly the thought that though different religions have different names for God and different ways of worshiping God, that they're all basically worshiping the same God in the end. That's not what the Bible says. Jesus said that he is the way, he is the truth, he is the life, and there is no other way to have eternal life, but by faith in him. The Samaritans believed they could simply add God, Yahweh, to the long list of other gods that they worshipped, and that that would be fine. Verse 2 says, Now this statement was true from the Samaritans' point of view, but it was absolutely false from God's perspective. The Samaritans sought to appease God to avoid punishment, but they had not forsaken the other gods that they worshipped. Look again with me at verse 3 and how the leaders of God's people responded. But Zerubbabel, Yeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses in Israel said to them, You have nothing to do with us in building a house to our God, but we alone will build to the Lord the God of Israel as King Cyrus, the king of Persia, has commanded us. This was an important but costly decision.

Think about it. From one point of view, this might seem like perfect timing. Maybe even a blessing from God. From one point of view, you could see maybe God's hand in this.

[ 27 : 16 ] Because no doubt, these returnees could have used the extra hands and the extra funds that the Samaritans were probably willing to give in the rebuilding of the temple. So why did they

refuse the help?

Well, the Jewish leaders understood that the Samaritans' faith in God was compromised. They were avoiding the influence they would bring into their fellowship and more importantly into the temple whose purpose was for the worship of the one true living God. They were avoiding the very idolatry that caused the Lord to send them into captivity in the first place. The Samaritans did not share the same convictions, nor did they submit themselves to the authority of Scripture.

Remember, when the returnees came back, all that they were doing was according to as it is written in the Scriptures that they had. Since the Samaritans did not submit themselves to the authority of Scripture alone as the foundation of truth, the Jews said to them, no thanks. They would not, at this point, blur the line which separated biblical truth from satanic deception. They faced a difficult choice, but in this case they made the right one, even though it came with a cost.

You know, we all face choices like this, don't we, in life? Decisions where we're tempted to compromise our Christian beliefs, compromise our Christian convictions and who we are in Christ because we're afraid of offending other people, especially those people who could help us, who could advance us in some way. Maybe at work you get invited to a party or a concert by a boss or an acquaintance. Their influence could help you.

Being their friend could help you maybe get a promotion one day. Or maybe they're just really popular and their approval of you could help you likewise climb the social ladder.

[ 29 : 47 ] Do you go even though you know that what they are doing or what they are going to be celebrating there is not compatible with Scripture? Again, maybe you think, but this will give me an opportunity to witness. And if that's true, then good. That's great. Wonderful. But it could be that that's your excuse to go anyways. Because truly what you're after is not their good, that they would see Christ in you, but that you would be promoted or elevated in your career or your life in some way.

What about you students? You're in a class, a science class maybe, that teaches the theory of evolution as fact. Or you're in a sociology class that promotes Marxism and other kinds of worldviews that are incompatible with Scripture. Do you appease your teacher to get a good grade? Or do you write a paper and maybe you take a stance? You point out the major flaws in those views and the disastrous consequences that come with promoting such beliefs. Whose help is more important to you? God's help or man's help? Do you trust in God and do what He says? Or do you do whatever is necessary to appease the world and keep you from potentially offending them? You know, there's a lot of ways we could use our church building to make a profit. A lot of ways. We could rent out our sanctuary for all sorts of things. Concerts or I like football, Monday night football. Or video games.

And we could use all these screens that we have and charge at the door and have a great time. We could do all different kinds of things. We could get rid of whatever process we have for membership and just let people join no matter what, just for being here. Hey, you want to join?

You like Monday night football? You like playing video games on our big screens? Great. We're happy to have you here. From one standpoint, it would make sense. But we'd do so to our peril because we'd be giving Satan an opportunity to potentially infiltrate our church and take our focus off our mission and drive us away from biblical truth.

[ 32 : 31 ] Satan has always tried to infiltrate the people of God by planting tares amongst the wheat. Jesus talked about that in Matthew 13. Satan tries to infiltrate our minds with lies that disrupt God's purpose.

Remember, after Jesus had asked His disciples who they believed He was, it was Peter who courageously spoke up and said, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus praised Him for that correct response. But just moments later, after Jesus explained that He would return to Jerusalem and there He would suffer and die, the Bible says in Matthew 16, 22, that Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, far be it from you, Lord, this shall never happen to you.

But Jesus turned to Peter and said, get behind me, Satan. You are a hindrance to me, for you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.

You must fill your mind with God's Word to prevent it and your heart from being infiltrated by Satan's deception. If it can happen to Peter, it can happen to you.

[ 34 : 04 ] Ezra is eager for us to learn that danger looks in the guise of a genuine offer to help. We must be aware of this scheme. And like Israel's leaders in verse 3, we must say no to those people

or to those things that would compromise our fellowship with the Lord.

And you must say no to those things that would compromise your mind, your heart, your body, because you are a temple of the Holy Spirit, and you are to be a living sacrifice to the Lord.

And whatever you say and whatever you do, it is to be done for His glory, who is gracious to save you, again, from Satan's ultimate scheme, which was to keep you from saving faith in Jesus Christ. So He tries to infiltrate the second scheme we see that He uses is intimidation. Intimidation, promoting discouragement.

We know that the Samaritans' offer to help the Jews was insecure because of...or insincere, excuse me, because of how they responded to their refusal in verses 4 and 5. In verse 4, it says, And the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build.

[ 35 : 25 ] Discouragement is one of the devil's favorite tactics to try to thwart the work of God. The Jews were already discouraged by how many of them were stuck in the past.

They had that issue to deal with. And now added to that were the threats being thrown against them by their unbelieving neighbors.

They were being assaulted from without. They were being assaulted from within. Satan's goal is to persuade God's people to give up on obedience and the cost associated with that and to give in to the world that He rules.

Why? Why? Well, it shuts us up, doesn't it? It shuts us down when we're discouraged. We would rather not bear the cross Christ called us to bear because it means suffering.

We want people to like us. We want people to accept us. It's hard to go against culture because people say mean things about us.

[ 36 : 37 ] Just ask Harrison Butker, the kicker for the Kansas City Chiefs, who all he did was just talk about some things that the Bible says that he lives by.

They call us old-fashioned. They call us hateful. They call us bigots, homophobic, closed-minded, misogynistic. And those are the polite names. I could go on. To take a stand for Christ and the truth he inspired in his word is to be labeled with hurtful words.

Why do they do that? To intimidate us. To discourage us. So that we won't speak the truth. Let's be real.

Discouragement is an extremely effective tool. For example, there are many times when I've encountered someone after church with a complaint or a discouraging comment.

And I go home, and no matter how good the worship was, no matter how many great things people said about the worship, it's that discouraging comment or it's that discouraging thing that goes with me all through the week.

[ 37 : 51 ] And sometimes longer than that. And I'm sure you've been in that spot, and that's happened to you too. Discouragement just has a way of blocking everything else out, doesn't it?

Somebody says something to you that is hurtful, that is painful, or that's critical, and that's all you can think about, and you just block everything out for days and sometimes weeks.

Because Satan knows that discouraging words hurt. And they have a way to take our focus off of things almost more so than anything else.

I wonder if maybe you can see a bit of yourself in the attitude expressed by the Samaritans. Often what is happening in our churches becomes about what is best for me or what is best for you.

When you don't get to sing the solo, when you aren't asked to teach the class or get the opportunity that somebody else is going to get, how do you respond?

[ 39 : 01 ] When someone else is asked to sing or play an instrument or teach a class or join the staff, write an article, chair a committee, do you first think, that should be me? Why didn't they ask me?

Or do you praise the Lord and you pray for that person? Yeah, they'll do good. I hope that they'll do great for our church. Sometimes Satan infiltrates the church by promoting discouraging thoughts in our minds that give birth to intimidating actions which divide us in ways that cause us to lose sight of what truly matters.

Don't let him. James 4.7 says, But the Samaritans didn't stop sowing seeds of discouragement.

Verse 5, it says, And so what the Samaritans do here is they take legal action to bog down the Jews into litigation that would take their time and their focus, that would distract them from their purpose for which God had brought them back.

This caused, so not, we have already the issue that pre, that was the internal conflict, right? Some people stuck in the past, some people were wanting to move forward, we have this internal strife, now you add this external conflict, they came back to rebuild the temple, and these conflicts caused them to stop doing what God sent them to do for 16 years.

[ 40 : 53 ] 16 years. Some of you aren't even that old. You know what's lacking in this passage at this point, after this intimidating threat?

There's a good response to the first scheme, isn't there? But there's no indication that the people sought God in any way, especially in prayer, to intervene on their behalf at this point.

They needed to look to God in faith, who Ephesians 3.20 says, now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power that is at work within us.

That's how discouraging, I think, or that's how intimidating, discouragement can be, that it, again, they didn't think that, you know what, maybe we should pray about this as a people.

Let's get together and ask for God's help. Are you discouraged? Are you fearful this morning? How often, how much, have you taken those things to the Lord in prayer?

[ 42 : 07 ] Are you intimidated by the voices that tell you to stop when God is telling you to go?

Satan can't take away your salvation, but he can discourage you to the point where he robs you of the joy of your salvation for a time in this life.

You know, I think one of the reasons so many Christians love the book of Psalms is because of how accurately it portrays what it's like to face Satan and his schemes.

They often start on a high note, right? Praise you, Lord. You are good. You are holy. You are faithful. And then it descends down into discouragement.

Enemies surround me. God, you seem distant from me. I need help. But then it goes back up and it ends with praise and the realization that God keeps us, that God preserves his people, that God saves us.

And so for you, maybe you're down in the valley this morning and you are discouraged. Satan, sin, and the world have punched you in the mouth, infiltrated your mind with lies, intimidated you with discouraging words and maybe actions from others.

[ 43 : 39 ] Well, welcome to the club. Welcome to the club whose founding member is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Didn't Jesus face these satanic schemes? Satan infiltrated his small group of disciples, Judas who betrayed him, Peter who denied him.

Didn't Jesus face intimidation? The Jewish leaders who lied about him, who beat him, who spit on him, who worked with the Romans to crucify and kill him.

How did he respond to the things that impede our pursuit of God's will? Did he stop? Did he quit? Did he surrender? No. He didn't. Philippians 2 is one of my favorite passages of Scripture.

[ 44 : 48 ] I'm going to read verses 5 through 11. Because in Christ, we can go through and face these schemes. We don't do it alone. We have the Holy Spirit.

We have salvation. We have his example, which is what this passage talks about. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours.

It's yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form.

He humbled himself. By becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

So we see this. We see Satan's schemes. We understand how he works and plots against God's people. How should we adjust our lives according to what we've read?

[ 46 : 12 ] I think it's this. Fear God only. Fear God only. And by that I mean obey him. Pursue him.

Worship him. Seek him first. Seek him only. No matter the cost. Because you'll pay a higher cost at some point if you don't.

So as a believer we have the example of Jesus, don't we? Someone who Satan came and tempted directly to his face and all along the way to the cross someone who is working to infiltrate, someone who is working to intimidate.

And Jesus would not be sidetracked from his mission. In his humility he knew what he had come to do. And nothing would distract him from that.

And do what he did going all the way to the cross where he was crucified. Where his blood was shed. Where he experienced the forsakeness of God as he who knew no sin became sin so that by faith in him we receive his righteousness.

[ 47 : 34 ] He did it and he did it willingly and he succeeded and he's won. Praise God. And in him you'll win too. There'll be times of discouragement.

There'll be times of fear. And in those moments what you most need to do is get close to Jesus. Get close to his word. And in the way that he does he'll lift your face dry your eyes and he'll remind you of what's important and how small these things that seem so big really are.

Same thing for you if you have not believed in Jesus. If you don't know him as Lord and Savior he's calling you today. He's trying to set you free from the schemes of Satan to keep you from him.

Another one of Satan's schemes is to make you feel that you'll never be good enough. That you've sinned too much. That there's something that you need to do for God to forgive you. Let me tell you that there's nothing that you need to do.

There's nothing that you could ever do. Besides turn to Jesus repenting over your sins and to him in faith. And you'll be saved. completely and totally and eternally saved.

[ 48 : 52 ] And I encourage you to do that today. Let's pray. Lord we're thankful to know that God you have been tempted in every way that we are yet without sin.

That you know what it's like to face Satan and his schemes. Lord you've given us your word to arm us and to protect us from them.

And God we know that you're merciful and you're gracious because so often we we have your word and we know the truth but we still find ourselves being discouraged and fearful.

And we find ourselves intimidated and silent. God but Lord again you are gracious and merciful to us like you were to these people in Ezra who even though they've stopped for 16 years the project didn't come to an end because in the end Lord you will have your way.

God I pray for whoever here this morning is feeling discouraged. Whoever is here this morning who has compromised their convictions to make a better life for themselves or so they think I pray God that through your word this morning you've encouraged them to stop.

[ 50 : 17 ] Pray that you've encouraged the discouraged to turn to you and to come to you and to trust in you. God I pray for our church. I pray that we would be one that's united in our purpose the purpose that you've given us in your word.

God we know that we're not to be of the world but you have called us to be in the world. We have a responsibility we have a command from you to go to them and to be a light in the darkness that they would hopefully see and believe and so Lord help us encourage us to do that.

Father we need your help in all of these ways and we know that you provide it to us in Jesus Christ your son in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. Amen.