

Life Answers in Genesis

The Devil is Last

A Message for Trinity Evangelical Free Church of Teaneck, NJ

Sunday, October 27, 2019

Introduction

We're going to start today with a frightening image:



This picture is associated with an article entitled, "Mom spots terrifying 'ghost baby' in son's crib; says she 'could kill' husband after learning cause". The article describes a woman who put her 18-month-old boy into his crib at bedtime. Their family has a monitor in the room, so she can look in during the night. When she did, she was so frightened that she "she barely got any shut-eye". In the monitor she saw what looked like the face of a "ghost baby" in the crib with her son.

At first, she thought her eyes were playing tricks on her. However, she couldn't put her fear away. So, she crept into the boy's room several times with a flashlight. Each time, there was no sign of any apparition. Then, she left the room and looked at the monitor, there it was.

Add to this: Her husband had to work that night, so she was alone! We can all imagine the fear that she felt.

The next morning, she went into the room to investigate. Here's her description of what she saw: "It turns out my husband just forgot to put the mattress protector on when he changed the sheets," she wrote on Facebook, revealing a large picture of a baby's face on a price tag attached to the mattress.



The face which is what this woman saw on the camera – is usually covered by the mattress protector, which goes under the sheet. Mystery solved!

In this case, we've had a little fun. However, we've all heard scary stories of the supernatural. Many don't have such non-supernatural outcomes. We tend to hear the scary stories around Halloween, but in America and other parts of the world, the scary stories are now stretched out to the entire year. In those stories, we see:

- Images of the supernatural.
- Images of the insane and violent.
- Images of death.

We're continuing our series, "Life Answers in Genesis". Life is full of questions. You can find answers to many of them by reading the first few chapters of Genesis.

At this time of year, another question comes up. It's a question some don't like to ask. Here it is:

Could there be supernatural forces that work against us?

Well, I have good news and bad news. The bad news: Yes: There ARE supernatural forces in our world that work against us. They are led by an individual known as The Devil and Satan. Here's the good news: **You don't need to fear The Devil or his forces.** In order to find out why, we need to take a look at this individual called the Devil. One of the previous messages in our series had the title, "God is First."

Our message today is entitled: "The Devil is last."

Let's find out why.

I. Who Is the Devil?

Let's start by finding out who this individual is. The main name given to the Devil in the Scriptures is "Satan". It's a word that means, "adversary". So, right off, we have an answer to our main question. "Are there supernatural forces that work against us?" Well, the Devil is an adversary, and an adversary is someone who works against us. And, he is supernatural. There you go.

Here's a definition of the Devil from the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia:

"A created but superhuman, personal, evil, world-power, represented in Scripture as the adversary both of God and men."

Where do they get that definition? We meet Satan, or the Devil, in a number of places in the Scripture. One of the places is in Ezekiel, chapter 28:12-19. In this passage, the prophet Ezekiel is addressing an ancient king. The king is so evil that Ezekiel compares him to the Devil. Let's look at a few verses.

"Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; (Ezekiel 28:12-13)

What do we learn in this passage? When he was created, the Devil was:

- Perfect: He was the model for all the other angels.
- Full of Wisdom
- Beautiful: Perfect! We hear about a "perfect 10". Well, that was him. Every precious stone adorned him. He wasn't just beautiful, he possessed rare beauty.

It also says that he was in the garden. We'll talk more about that later. For now, this establishes the fact that, although he appeared in the form of a serpent, it was the Devil who in the garden during the opening chapters of Genesis.

Let's read more.

You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. (vs. 13-15)

What do we learn here? First, the Devil was a Cherub. Some believe, based on the Scripture, that there are levels of angelic beings. There are Seraphim and Cherubim. There are angels and Archangels. The Cherubim are mighty ones. They're defenders of sacred things. They're pictured with flaming swords in their hands. We don't know just how powerful he is, but the Devil is from a warrior class of angelic beings.

Second, the Devil wasn't just perfect in beauty; he was morally perfect. He was blameless. He was qualified to walk on the holy mountain of God - The holiest place in the universe.

Third, he was created. Although he is mighty, he is limited. He is not infinite and all-powerful, as God is.

But then we're told that "wickedness was found" in him. What happened?

Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; (vs 17)

We aren't told the exact process that occurred. We aren't given a step-by-step. We're just told that ***pride caused the devil's downfall***. He was taken with his own beauty. His great wisdom was corrupted.

God gives wisdom to the beings in his creation with the hopes that it will be used for good things. It was clear that the Devil was now intent on using the wisdom that God had given him for evil. It was clear that the Devil was planning to use the mighty power of a Cherubim for violence and sin. So, God had to throw the Devil out of heaven.

So, now we know who the devil is. He is an angelic being who became evil. He is an adversary who works against God and humans. From here, we learn about the Devil by looking at how he acts. Let's ask the question, What Does the Devil Do?

II. What Does the Devil Do?

A. He Deceives: The Devil in the Garden of Eden

Recall that the Devil appears through the serpent and tempts Adam and Eve. They fall to the temptation and eat the forbidden fruit. God appears and asks them to explain themselves. Adam points his finger at Eve and attempts to blame her. So, God talks to Eve. Let's see what she has to say.

13 Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate. (Genesis 3:13)"

Sadly, Eve figured out what happened a bit late. She now understands that she has been lied to. She has been deceived. Here is a sad warning: ***The Devil lies a lot.***

We said a few minutes ago that the devil is powerful. The Cherubs are mighty warriors. Here though, he shows no power. He uses only words.

What do the lies look like? We've seen the main categories several times in our series. Let's look again - In the Garden, and still today, the Devil uses his words to cause doubt.

The Devil wants us to:

- Doubt God's Word
- Doubt God's Power
- Doubt God's Character

We don't have time to re-explain these, so I'll encourage anyone who hasn't heard this material to look at the other parts of our series.

For today, we can make this even simpler: God spoke clearly to Adam and Eve. The Devil suggested that there was some good reason to ignore what God said. But, it was deception. It was all lies.

As we've said numerous times over the last few weeks, God tells us all kinds of wonderful things using words. Those words are recorded in the Bible. The Devil gives us all kinds of reasons to ignore what God says. But it's all lies. Adam and Eve believed the lies of the Devil, and so they rebelled against God. They put themselves first. To this day, words, in the form of lies, are still the Devil's preferred tool. This is why one of his titles in the Bible is "The Deceiver".

We'll talk about defending against the lies of the Devil in a little bit. For now, let's look at another appearance of the Devil in the Scriptures. This one is found in the book of Luke.

B. The Devil and the Disciples: Tester

Here we learn that the Devil put people through tests. Just prior to the crucifixion, Jesus had these words for Peter:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers. (Luke 22:31)"

What does it mean to "sift as wheat"? Wheat is planted as a seed and grows into a tall grass. You have a long stalk, with grains at the top of the stalk. You want the grain, but you don't want the stalk and other parts of the plant. How do you get them apart? At harvest time, the grass becomes dry. Today, farmers have machines to handle the harvest. In the days of Jesus, the farmers started by cutting down the stalks with a sharp sickle. The stalks were then bundled up and taken to a place with a hard surface. There, the harvesters would beat the stalks to make the grain fall off. In many parts of the world, this old fashion technique is still employed. Here's an example:



You then throw everything in the air hoping the wind will drive away the stuff you don't want – also known as chaff. Then the process is repeated. The grain is beaten, then exposed to the wind, and then beaten again until the harvesters get just what they want.

So, Jesus is saying to Peter, ***“The Devil has asked permission to really beat you up.”***

We've said that Satan often uses words, in the form of lies, to cause problems. He does sometimes use his power. He has the power to put people in danger. He can, so to speak, put people through beatings. These can be physical. These can be emotional.

But notice something very important: When it came to Peter and the apostles, the Devil had to ask permission to cause pain. This leads to an important principle for us: *When it comes to followers of Jesus, the Devil must ask permission to cause pain or injury.* He is no free agent, hurting whomever he chooses. Although mighty, he is a limited being who must submit to the will of God.

Now, here's an important question. Why does God allow this? This is hard. Here's the answer: God has a plan for all of us. One of the things God wants us to have is faith. Sometimes, for our faith to grow, we need to be tested; ***We need to have something taken away so that God can give us something better. And sometimes, having things taken away is painful.***

We'll talk more about that in the second part of our discussion today. Let me mention here that the Devil has to ask permission when he causes problems for God's people. Now, it sure helps a lot if your one of God's people. This is a good time to invite God into your life. Talk to us at Trinity Church – we'll tell you how. Or, you can visit Billy Graham's site:

www.PeaceWithGod.net

So far, we've learned who the Devil is. We know what he does.

- He lies a lot.
- He puts people through tests.

- These tests can be painful.

So now, let's talk about how to deal with him.

III. How to Deal with the Devil

How do we deal with the Devil? You face the Devil by doing all the things we've been talking about over the last few weeks.

The Devil lies:

- We face him with Truth that we've learned from God's Word.

The Devil tests:

- We understand that God has a plan for us.
- If something we care about is taken away, it's because God has something better.

Let's look at an example of these things in action. When we're done this series, we'll start a study in the Book of Matthew. One of the passages from that book tells the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness. Let's read about it:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (Matthew 4:1-4)

So, Jesus knew that his Father had a plan for him. We don't know how he determined each step, but in this case the plan involved Jesus fasting for a long time. All we know here is that Jesus believed his Father wanted him to do this (We're told that the Spirit of God led him). This meant that Jesus had to willingly place himself in a position where he was very, very hungry.

The Devil comes along and puts Jesus through a test. We'll go into exactly what was happening when we get to the story in Matthew. For now, let's just say the Devil tries to give Jesus a good reason why Jesus shouldn't do what his Father has told him to do.

Jesus answers the temptation using God's Word. Here's an important point: Jesus is the Son of God. He could have said anything he wanted to say, and it would have become God's Word. **He chooses instead to use the words that have been given to the rest of us.** Words that are found in the Scriptures. These words come from the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 8, vs 3. Jesus knows them well. He has taken the time to read them. In this case he can recite them by memory.

The devil tries to lie to Jesus.

- Jesus responds with the truth from God's word.

The devil puts Jesus to the test

- Jesus answers with the fact that he knows his father has a plan.

Jesus puts his Father First. Jesus puts God's Word First. So, Jesus gives us the example.

He doesn't ask us to do things he hasn't done himself.

Now, the Scriptures are full of things you can do to deal with the Devil. I wish we had time to go through them all. Time doesn't permit us to visit Ephesians 6 or other important passages. Let's mention just two more.

Prayer is important. Jesus taught his disciples how to pray.

“... lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:13)

When Adam and Eve faced the serpent in the Garden, they made a number of mistakes. One was to deal the Devil by themselves. There was no need for that. They could have asked for God's help. He would have gladly given it. Today, we can ask for God's help through prayer. That's a whole topic.

For today, we'll settle for one more important help: **Know the fate of the Devil**

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:10)

In the book of Revelation, the apostle John tells what will happen at the end of the ages. There will be titanic battles between the forces of evil and good. In the end, the Devil is no match for god. He will lose. He will be punished. Someday, 10,000 years from now, the Devil will be a sad footnote in history. Perhaps he'll even be forgotten all together.

A reminder: If you read those passages in Revelation, it won't just be the Devil who is judged in the end times. There will be many who have never followed Jesus, I'm sorry to say that they won't be far behind. That's why we need to reach our friends with the message of the Gospel. That's why we need to invite Jesus into our lives as our Savior and Lord.

Conclusion

So, in a we're treated to all kinds of scary images. And people will ask, “Could it be that there really are supernatural forces that work against us?”

The answer is yes. Those forces are led by a fallen angelic being known as the Devil. The images that we see in the coming days are intended to scare us - Images of the supernatural and ghosts

and madness and death. But today we've let the book of Genesis introduce us to our adversary. We've looked around the Scriptures and we've learned that we need not fear him.

We know that the Devil's main power is lies.

- So, we deal with him by learning the truth of God's word.

We know that he puts people through tests.

- So, we must be ready for him. We must remind ourselves that God has a plan for us.

We know that we can pray.

- We don't need to face the Devil alone.

And we know that someday, the Devil will be defeated.

- But, if we follow Jesus, we will be with the winners.

We've learned in our series that God is first. We all need to recognize that and put him first in our lives. The Devil failed at that. He could have been a premier example of a servant of God. He could have been an example of someone who is rewarded for service to God. Instead, he threw all that away. ***Because he failed at putting God first, he will be last for all eternity.***

Instead, let's consider the example of our Lord Jesus Christ. He put his Father first. He put others before him and became the servant of all humankind. His service took him to the cross. We read about the results of this in Philippians:

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians Chapter 2:9-11)

Jesus is our example. If we follow him, if we give him and God's Word priority in our lives, we will never fear the Devil.

References:

All Bible references come from the New International Version.

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Image: farmer Threshing wheat - A_farmer.jpg Jayaseerlourdhuraj, from Wiki Commons Images