

Good morning, everyone! My name is Emerson and today I'm going to talk about the devil!

For most of my life, I have forgotten about the existence of Satan, other than times when I can't get my technology to work and I exclaim, "What devilry is this?" or other times when someone tempts me with a DQ run when I'm trying to avoid sugar and I say, "Get behind me, Satan!" Other than that, I don't think about the devil much.

And I don't think I'm alone in this.

Recently, Gallup ran a poll and found that the average American's belief in the devil is at an all-time low—58% of people in 2023 compared to 70% in 2004.

And yet, I don't think we can get very far without some semblance of 'devilry' in our world. As John Mark Comer said:

For Jesus, the secular theories that attempt to explain evil as simply a lack of education, inadequate wealth redistribution, Marxist power analysis, or even the toxicity of religion gone bad all fall short of explaining reality. The only way to make sense of evil in all its malevolence—from large, global systems of evil, such as systemic racism or economic colonialism, to much smaller, human-scale evil, such as our inability to stop our self-destructive drinking or hold back biting comments toward our friends—is to see an animating force behind it, adding fuel to the proverbial fire.

The point I'm making is this: We see evil in our world. And we have explanations. But without a satan, the explanations are inadequate.

In Revelation, John has been pulling back the curtain on all kinds of things: Jesus is among his Church (Revelation 2-3), God is on the throne (Revelation 4), Jesus is the victorious Lamb (Revelation 5), etc. In Revelation 12, John is pulling back the curtain to say that behind all the hardship, all the temptation, all the persecution, all the death, there is a real malevolence in our world. But what is that malevolence? Why that malevolence? How do we overcome that malevolence?

Revelation 12 shows us three things: (1) The Eternal Struggle; (2) Reasons for the Eternal Struggle; and (3) Overcoming the Eternal Struggle. Let's start with the first.

1. The Eternal Struggle

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great

dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (Revelation 12:1-9)

We have three characters:

1. A woman, clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and twelve stars on her head, and pregnant. Who is this woman? Some think it's Mary; others think it's the Messianic community. This is God's people under the old covenant (Israel, which includes Mary, who gave birth to the Messiah), and it's God's people under the new covenant (the Church), whom this dragon will later pursue.
2. A son who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. Who is this son? None other than Jesus himself.
3. A dragon with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns on its heads, who sweeps one third of the stars from the sky, flinging them to the earth; he seeks to devour this woman's son. Who is this dragon? Verse 9 tells us it's Satan!

So, three characters—woman, son, and dragon. The text continues:

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus. (Revelation 12:13-17)

Here's the point I want to make with all of this: Before Christ came, there was a struggle—the dragon sought the woman's child. When Christ came, there was a struggle—the dragon wanted to devour the woman's child. After Christ came, there is *still* a struggle—the dragon wages war against the woman and her children again! *This* is the eternal struggle.

Satan is rampaging against God. But he can't get at God. So who does he go after? *God's people*.

Remember Genesis 3, in the garden? God makes everything good. But what happened? Well, the devil comes along and tempts Eve, and in tempting her, he calls the Word of God into question ("Hath God said?"). Then what happens? Exile, shame, blame, guilt, separation between God and man, conflict between humans.

But it wasn't only in the beginning. Satan raged against the early Church, too. Consider Stephen. Acts 6 tells us that God's word was on the move. One person it moved through was a man named Stephen. Luke tells us, "Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people" (Acts 6:8). But you know what happens next? Opposition. False testimony. Brought before the Sanhedrin. What does Stephen do? He preaches the gospel. And the Sanhedrin did not like it!

When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. (Acts 7:54-57)

Demonic? Satanic? Yep. But let's get this on the ground because Satan works in our day, too. Dan and I were messaging the other day, and he shared with me an article with the subtitle "One leadership failing after another has affected more than 50,000 congregants in North Texas." You see that? 50,000!

That's Satan getting his hold on pastors! But now let's get this on the ground a bit more.

In John 8:44b, Jesus describes Satan as a *liar*: "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Now, here's the thing: Satan doesn't tempt us with blatant, bold-faced lies that everyone could see coming a mile away! Growing up I always thought that the way Satan would work would be like this: "Be an atheist," or "Go get drunk," or "Have sex before marriage." Yes, Satan will try to ruin our lives in "BIG SIN" kinds of ways, but often it's more subtle:

- You are not an unceasing spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's universe.
- The evidence of God's reality and God's presence in your life is suspect.
- The outcomes of your life are on your shoulders and you control them, so you must have that constant pressure on your life.
- Satisfying your desires and appetites is central to your well-being and a wise strategy for living.
- Life is empty, life's a joke, and it's not worth putting your faith in people; they'll only let you down.

That's how Satan works. He's conniving and mischievous. He's a liar. My bringing all this up isn't to bum you out. It's to make you aware. All this shows us that we're in an eternal struggle.

But why? Why is there this struggle? Why does Satan rage?

2. (Reasons for) The Eternal Struggle

There are three reasons for Satan's rage against God's people:

1. Satan's time is short—"He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short" (Revelation 12:12b).
2. Satan's sphere is restricted—"When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child" (Revelation 12:13).
3. Satan's success is limited—

The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus. (Revelation 12:14-17)

So, three reasons: Satan's time, short; his sphere, restricted; and his success, limited!

Why does Satan rampage? Let me share an illustration. It's like how historians recognize the difference between D-Day (June 1944) and V-Day (Spring 1945) in WWII. D-Day was when the Allied troops

invaded Europe and began pushing the Germans back to Germany, while V-Day was the time when Allied forces actually secured victory.

Oscar Cullman, using this analogy and comparing it to the Christian life, says this:

The decisive battle in a war may already have occurred in a relatively early stage of the war, and yet the war still continues. Although the decisive effect of that battle is perhaps not recognized by all, it nevertheless already means victory. But the war must still be carried on for an undefined time, until 'Victory Day.' Precisely this is the situation of which the New Testament is conscious, as a result of the recognition of the new division of time; the revelation consists precisely in the fact of the proclamation that that event on the cross, together with the resurrection which followed, was the already concluded decisive battle.

Scripture clearly teaches this D-Day/V-Day reality for Christians: Christ has decisively won the victory, and yet Jesus' followers still fight against Satan until Christ comes again to put a final end to the war. This is why Satan rampages—because he's already lost! His territory has dwindled and he knows that God's wrath will fall upon him!

So that's WHY, but what about us? How do we overcome? Do we have a way to fight? Or are we left to get hit by the shrapnel?

3. Overcoming the Eternal Struggle

It's interesting that right in the middle of all this struggle, we read this:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." (Revelation 12:10-11)

So, Satan has been thrown down. His end is near. How do we triumph? In two ways: (1) by the blood of the Lamb; (2) by the word of our testimony.

For these churches in Revelation 2 and 3 going through hardship, what John is saying is that, because of Jesus, come what may, God's got them! And, like we talked about last week, that God will use their faithfulness to Jesus, even their martyrdom, as witness to the world!

We may not be about to join the martyrs, but I know that in my life, my sin can weigh me down. I can be prone to believing lies straight from the mouth of Satan himself. The evil I read and see on the news leaves me dumbfounded. It can be taxing and hard!

Overcoming by the blood of the Lamb means that we can shove the devil back down in his hole anytime we cling to the objective implications of the gospel. What's that mean? It means you cling to the fact that God has saved you from your sin. It means you cling to the fact that you are God's and that he loves you. It means you cling to the fact that the world is alive with his reality and his presence!

What does overcoming by our testimony mean? It means that every redemptive act of Christian love or faithfulness (i.e., living the gospel), as small as it may be, is another way we shove the devil down in his hole. Every time you share about how God met you in your brokenness and that you're relying on him, every time your coworker expresses a struggle and you offer to pray and then do it, every time you sing to

your little girl about the goodness of God, every time you memorize a passage of Scripture to change your thought life, every time you choose forgiveness for your spouse, every time you opt not to lie or opt to tell the truth—these are other ways that we shove the devil down in his hole.

I'll end with this: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). This Christ has done!

Martin Luther, the famous 15th century reformer, understood this verse. In his famous hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," he writes this:

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

When we cling to the gospel, we silence the Accuser. When we live the gospel, through our lives, we, in defiance to the devil, say, "God. Has. Won!"