

The Battle on Earth Between Satan and the Church

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: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Dylan Marais

- [0 : 0 0] I wonder, has the Christmas glow already begun to wear off for you? Or maybe some of the few people on earth have still got that Christmas vibe.
- We've got our Christmas lights going, most of them. We had to take our Christmas, beautiful Christmas flower decoration out. That's started to wilt.
- I've begun to check my ESCOM app to see when load shedding is going to start again. A friend of mine in the UK posted on his Facebook account that they've already got Easter eggs out.
- He says, you know, he's just been born and they're preparing for his execution already. Well, as the Christmas spirit sort of fades out, we turn back to the same old issues that we've been dealing with.
- The same old things seem to come up, don't they? It seems like nothing has changed. Did Jesus coming really make a difference? Why does it seem like we're in this never-ending struggle in life?
- [1 : 0 2] Can't we ever get to a place where we can find peace and contentment and some semblance of victory? Our passage today tells us why that struggle is there.
- And it tells us that there's a really powerful and evil being wreaking havoc in the world, but also that that evil being doesn't get the final word.
- And today we learn that although Satan is defeated, he's still dangerous and actively hunting down Christians who must take a stand and fight back. Our victory is assured, but the battle is real.
- If we were following the Star Wars, the episode of Star Wars, this episode would be the Empire Strikes Back. And so our first port of call is we're going to look at what the dragon is busy doing.
- And we see, we're looking at the hunt of the dragon. The dragon in the middle of a hunt. See, Satan is mad and he wants revenge.
- [2 : 0 9] The war is real, even though Satan is defeated and his time is short. And so the Bible teaches a seeming paradoxical reality that although Satan is defeated, he's still actively engaged in trying to overthrow both the plans of God and the people of God.
- So have a look at verse 13 and 15 and 17 and see what the dragon is busy doing. When the dragon saw that he'd been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman had given birth to the male child.
- And then verse 15, the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with a flood. And then verse 17, the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring.
- The picture here is of Satan running around like an enraged beast, trying every trick in the book to take revenge on God by going after his people. The woman here really is the church.

Yes, I know it speaks of her offspring, but it's not just Israel anymore. If you remember in the first part of Revelation 12, it's kind of talking about Israel because that's the woman that gives birth to the Messiah.

[3 : 18] But it's not just Israel anymore. It's the conglomerate people of God, the people that follow the child that she gave birth to. In other words, the Christian church. And we take this truth on board that Satan is on the hunt and we are his target.

And we do well to think through some implications of this truth for us today. Now there's some who think there's no war because after all there is no Satan.

If you're not a Christian, you might be thinking, what are these people talking about? You look around you, you don't see any dragons running around.

So by the way, neither do Christians. The whole point is we can't see him. So there's an element of mystery. How does this work? But if there's no Satan, a non-Christian needs to account for actual objective evil in the world.

Not just the random clashing of atoms and some people die and some people live it. But our experience of the world isn't random or neutral. I mean, look at what happened.

[4 : 28] We'll review the videos of what Hamas did to their victims in the recent massacre in Israel, if you've got the stomach for it. It's just evil when you see what humans do to other humans. If you watch reality TV shows and see the interviews of murderers, you can see real intent, real evil in their eyes.

It's chilling to watch. And so there is something out there making people do horrible things to people, thinking that they're doing it in the name of freedom or love or truth.

However, Christians often make one of two mistakes that we need to avoid if we're going to correctly understand what our part is in this battle. And the first mistake we often make is that Satan is totally and utterly defeated.

I mean, in our passages, he's been thrown down. He's been cast out of heaven. That's the place where there's power and authority. It speaks about the kingdom of God that has arrived and salvation has come to the world.

And so Christians who think like this, that Satan is completely and totally defeated, think that victory is quick and easy to achieve. You just need to declare your miracle or pray a hedge of protection or bind Satan.

[5 : 47] But this doesn't account for the many times that Satan is unbound. And when bad things continue to happen, especially to the people of God. And so friends, we mustn't underestimate the power that our enemy has or the serious problems that he causes.

But there's another mistake, and that's to think that Satan is still in total control. The many Christians think that Satan actually has ultimate control of the world and that God is just saving souls and that any kind of victory over Satan or over evil will only come right at the end of time.

We often see this when Christians say things like, you know, the world is getting worse and worse and worse. Evil is going to get worse and worse and worse. And then depending on how you think of the end times, God is going to rapture us out of here.

Or when you die, you go to heaven. That's the aim. And there's nothing you can do in the meantime. Just hold on and wait for the end to come. But this is not how the Bible sees Jesus' victory.

Jesus' victory is a real victory, not a potential one. Satan has been dethroned. He has lost power and authority. And so we need to see the spiritual battle from a biblical perspective.

[7 : 07] And it's more nuanced than total victory now or total defeat now. Do you remember the story of Job in the Old Testament? How Satan had to plead with God to let him have his way with Job?

And how God gave him some authority to do some things? But that every time he put a boundary around how far Satan could go and what he could do, God is in ultimate control of what Satan is allowed to do and of what happens to his people.

And so that gives us hope, but at the same time we must be careful because Satan is a real threat. And that brings us to our next point about how God always protects his people from being overwhelmed by Satan's onslaughts.

And the next part of the story, we see that the woman is protected no matter what Satan tries to do to her. God is in total control of the situation and works in unexpected ways to work all things for the good of his people.

I don't know if you notice in our text, the dragon attempts at destroying God's people are thwarted at every turn. The woman is kept safe every time she's attacked.

[8 : 23] So, you see in verse 13, if you've got your Bibles there, verse 13, the dragon saw he'd been thrown down, he pursued the woman. That word pursued can mean persecuted, it's the same word in the Greek.

He's out to persecute her, to hunt her down and kill her if he can. In other words, to destroy the Christian church. But look what happens in verse 14. Now remember, this is that dragon that saved this, how many heads did he have?

Lots of heads, lots of horns, big and scary, can't be stopped, and there's this beautiful woman. So how does she get saved? Well, have a look at verse 14. The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished, cared for, provided for, for a time, times and half a time.

Okay, so that's one escape. Then in verse 15, the serpent pours water like a river out of his mouth. It's going to sweep her away with a flood. Look what happens in verse 16. But this time, the earth comes to help the woman.

And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured out. Wings flying to the wilderness. Earth-swallowing floods.

[9 : 39] Times, times, half a time. What on earth is going on here? It could be back in fantasy land, for all we know. Well, not if you have a Jewish background.

Because John, here, is using well-known Old Testament picture language for how God saves and protects his people from evil powers beyond their ability. And that language comes straight out of Exodus.

In Exodus 19, when Moses is reflecting, or actually God is telling Moses on what he's done and how he saved him out of Exodus. In chapter 19, verse 3, it's up on the screen.

Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, And this is what you are to tell the house of Jacob and explain to the sons of Israel. You have seen for yourselves what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Can you see that that's similar language that we find in Revelation? So God has always been doing that with his people. God always provides, often in powerful and miraculous ways, for his people to escape from being destroyed, so they can still remain in the fight.

[10 : 57] But, you need to look closely at how God does that. I don't know if you noticed, but God isn't mentioned in the way that he saves a woman in Revelation 12.

It doesn't say that God gave her wings. It doesn't say that God opened the earth. It just says, she got some wings, and then she flew off. And then the earth opened up. What does it mean for us?

Well, it means that God works in the background, and that he saves through surprising and unexpected ways, often overturning a seeming defeat and turning it into an actual victory.

So, think about the Exodus saga that we went through recently. Just imagine the shock that Satan received on getting the report of what happened the day the Israelites escaped.

Now, yes, Pharaoh is chasing the Israelites in the Exodus story, but behind Pharaoh, Pharaoh stands actually a satanic figure, and this dragon we know actually uses kingdoms to get at God's people.

[11 : 59] And so you've got the world superpower with this army of chariots chasing after a bunch of people, and they end up at this, they're in the desert plain, there's nowhere to run, and now they're standing at the sea, at their back.

They're dead meat. Or so it seems. So the demon comes to Satan. Lord, you won't believe it. Satan's like, yes, tell me the good news.

Tell me the Israelites are dead. Well, you see, there was your army, and then there was the sea. Well, what of it? Well, you see, the thing is, your army drowned.

And he's like, what? Say what? Why would they do that? How did that happen? Well, you see, there was this guy with a stick.

Look. And now, so guys, so friends, that's how God overturned seeming defeat and turns it into victory.

[13 : 07] That's the way that he operates. So when you go through the story of the Old Testament, you'll see time and time again, God sort of snatching victory out of the jaws of defeat in a way that is totally unexpected, both for his people, but also for his enemies.

God has always worked in this way, a kind of upside-down, wrong-way-round kind of salvation. He takes people that cannot fight and win by themselves, but then takes them and turns them into a fighting force that is unbeatable, if only they stay with him.

Paul, in Corinthians chapter 1, says this about the Christian church, just to make the point that God is still doing this in the same way today with his people. I'm just going to read from 1 Corinthians chapter 1.

1 Corinthians chapter 2. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. 1 Corinthians chapter 2. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

[14 : 25] As it is written, let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. And friends, those foolish things, those weak things, those lowly things, those despised things, that's us in the eyes of the world.

That's us in the eyes of our enemy. But behind us stands the almighty God of the universe. But why does God choose to save in this way?

Upside down, wrong way round kind of salvation. Only one answer really, and that's to make us realize that our salvation is all of Him and none of us.

But this takes faith. It takes trust. If you're standing on that seashore with that army coming at you, you needed to trust God that that man with a stick is going to do what God says he's going to do.

It doesn't look like he's going to do it. But the difference is if God has said that that man with a stick is going to save you by going through a sea, then what's the problem? He puts us in difficult situations, actually impossible situations, and says one thing to us.

[15 : 40] Trust me. I know what I'm doing. I have got a plan. And so friends, this passage is a challenge to us to trust in the absolute power, and absolute sovereignty, but also the absolute wisdom of God, even when He doesn't seem like He's there, and you don't know the details of your salvation, or your deliverance.

And that kind of salvation carries all the way through to the New Testament. There was another man, also with, I guess, another kind of stick, two sticks, two pieces of wood.

And Romans had killed thousands, probably hundreds of thousands, if not millions of people, of human beings that were destroyed by hanging on those same two pieces of wood.

But the difference is, when Jesus died on that cross, victory and power was unleashed on planet Earth.

But that takes trust and faith from our side to believe that that's the case. But okay, what exactly are we meant to do when we're caught up in the whirlwind, or the flood of events that seem likely to overwhelm us?

[17 : 08] How does trust overcome what Satan is doing? How are we to fight back? What are our weapons in this fight? But that brings us to our last point, how we as God's people fight back against our enemy.

We're going to spend a bit of time looking at the weapons of the offspring. The weapons of the offspring. In the war against Satan, Christians are called to obey God and to witness to the truth of the gospel, the truth of Jesus.

So back in Revelation 12, in verse 17, the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

Okay, at first glance, you might think to yourself, okay, so how are these things going to help me defend myself against that raging beast? What's the whole big deal about obedience?

For example, that's a strange thing to fight back with. Well, just consider the origins of the whole story of history.

[18 : 20] What is the thing that kicked off all the problems in the world? A serpent and disobedience. And so if God is going to undo what Satan does in the world, he needs people who are going to be obedient to him.

So think of disobedience or sin, not obeying God, as opening a door for the devil to gain a foothold in this world. That's exactly how he does it in Genesis 1.

In fact, Paul says in one of his letters, do not give into anger and so give the devil a foothold. It's a well-known verse. We think that means, yeah, it mustn't get angry, but that's fine.

But anger plays out in very strange ways in a person's life. If it's left unchecked, it leads straight to murder. Jesus knew that. That's why he said, don't be angry with people in your heart.

You've already murdered your brother if you're angry with him. If you're not living in obedience to God, you're letting the chaos, demon, back into the world and back into your life.

[19 : 28] So that's one thing to think about your life is, how much chaos have you got around you? I'm not saying the chaos that happens that the world throws at you.

There's enough of that. But how do you handle the chaos that comes your way? If you're obedient, chaos is minimized. But when you react in sin, you'll just find that chaos grows in your life, that there's disorder, unhappiness, things don't work out.

The way to fix that is to humble yourself and trust in God and in Christ. I mean, after all, what could be simpler than defeating the devil by just not listening to his lies, but instead listening to God?

I don't have to outthink him. I don't have to outsmart him. I don't have to be rich to overcome evil in the world. I don't have to have all the resources to take on this giant beast.

That's just Revelation 12. In Revelation 13, it's famous for ending with the mark of the beast, you know, that 666 mark of the beast. But before you even get there, in Revelation 13, there's these crazy beasts that come out of the sea and the sand, all empowered by Satan.

[20 : 43] They're sort of marionettes, puppets ruled by Satan. And what they are, it's the political and social forces, evil forces unleashed in the world. And you think, now how do we fight that?

All I need to do is listen to Jesus and trust him and do what he says in whatever circumstance I find myself. Like a soldier in a war, I just have to follow the orders of my commanding officer, Jesus Christ.

That's maybe part of the problem of the modern church of Christians struggling is we don't see Jesus as our commanding officer. He's our friend. He loves me.

I love him. And it's all lovely, warm feelings. You get the same feelings at Christmastime. Peace and joy and happiness and fun. But we forget that he's the king of kings and lord of lords and his word is law.

And by obeying it, we defeat the chaos dragon. But, if you're like me, my obedience falters, like all of us does, does that mean that we fail or the devil wins?

[21 : 57] No. No. Not if we do the last thing that we're told in this passage, to hold on to the reality of who Jesus is. We need to hold on to the reality of who Jesus is.

And Revelation tells us in no uncertain terms who Satan has to contend with. And it's not a fight that he can win. In fact, it's a fight that he's already lost.

Just look, for example, how Jesus is described in Revelation chapter 1. You might want to turn there. Revelation chapter 1. It's such a glorious picture of Jesus.

John has got this vision of one like a son of man from chapter 1 verse 12. I turned around to see the voice of the one speaking to me and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands.

But among the lampstands was someone like a son of man dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool as white as snow and his eyes were like blazing fire.

[23 : 09] His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held the seven stars and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword and his face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

And so when I saw him I fell at his feet as though dead but he placed his hand on me and said don't be afraid I am the first and the last. I am the living one.

I was dead. The dragon did win for a short time but behold I am alive forever and ever and now I Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades.

there is a massive spiritual wrestling match and the keys of death and Hades that Satan used to hold have been given to Christ and if you belong to him he can unlock death and Hades to you and give you life and so nothing the devil does can harm you and it's because of who Jesus is that we can follow his commands because we want to and we can do it with full assurance that no matter what happens to us in this life ultimate victory will be ours.

My friends the battle is real but the victory is assured. What that means for us we just need to get stuck in. So we need to fight with all our might expend all our energy on fighting a dragon and fighting his representatives on earth and not shrink from pain or death or discomfort or failure God is the specialist at working victory from failure using defeat to overcome using small things to dislodge big things using obscure nobodies like us like his church to change the lives of others and through that to change the world.

[25 : 24] So friends it's time for us to saddle up it's time for us to fight we have a dragon to slay and a world to win. The fight is real the battle is real but thanks be to God victory is assured.

Amen. Lord Jesus with such a wonderful picture vision of who you are and what you've done we know that we can trust you. Lord we're in the trenches and the battle is real and we're taking hits left, right and centre but you're in command you're in control help us to obey you help us to remember and to know and to hold on to who you are and what you've done you are the one that holds the keys of death and Hades and life and have promised and given us eternal life if we trust in you.

Bless us Lord as we fight the dragon and all he stands for in your name. Amen.