

THE MYSTERY OF GOD

Part 2

Welcome back to our assembly this evening. You are to be highly commended for both wanting to be here and for making the effort to be here. I am going to be continuing in the thoughts I began this morning on "The Mystery of God." Tonight I am going to be looking at Satan's part in this mystery. I began this morning with a reading from the 10th chapter of **Revelation, this evening I would ask you to open your Bible's to the 12th chapter** of that great and mysterious book. Let's read together all 17 verses of this chapter together. ...

You know, of course, as Peter tells us that "... *Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*" This morning, in class, we learned that we do not have a single enemy, nor do but we "...*wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*"

This morning, I spoke briefly on the possible reason why God permitted Satan access to the earth and mankind in the first place. Suffice it to say that He had His reasons, and His reasons are righteous and loving. Even so, we must not discount the fact that each of us have an enemy. No enemy has ever been so hateful, so vicious, so bent on one thing, and that is our eternal destruction. You may have had some people who have done you wrong. You may have had some people who didn't like you; who said bad things about you. Nevertheless, no one has ever had an enemy like this one. He is the great antagonist in what the Bible calls, "the mystery of God."

It was he who was present at the very beginning in the garden, and provided the temptation, cleverly disguised as an opportunity to satisfy one's desire and at the same time become as wise as God. He has worked tirelessly and without ceasing since that time to do everything within his power to destroy the works of God. Throughout history, the actions of this malevolent being, sometimes seen, and most of the time, unseen, have resulted in much of the sin and misery known in this world. I say "much" because as James 1:14, 15 says, we can't blame him for everything. The truth is, we are responsible for much of our own sin and misery.

Nonetheless, Satan's role in the mystery of God is considerable. We must not minimize or ignore his place and power. That is what I want to talk about tonight.

Just how Satan came to be who he is, is not fully explained in the scriptures. That too is part of the mystery. It would appear from a few references that seem to clearly picture him, that at one time he was numbered among the angels. In Isaiah 14, there is a prophecy concerning the king of Babylon, and there is another, very similar prophecy concerning the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28 that most scholars believe give us insight into Satan's origin.

We do not know just when angels were created, that isn't something spelled out for us in scripture, but we do know that they are created and not eternal spirit beings. We know that

because of what John tells us in his gospel, **chapter 1, verse 3**. John writes: *“All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.”* **Colossians 1:16** says, *“For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him.”*

We know from places such as **2 Peter 2:4**, and **Jude 1:6** that these angelic beings were capable of sinning. Thus they too were given the ability to make spiritual choices, choices that were based upon the nature of God. Like us, they had the freedom of will. Jude writes, *“And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”*

We cannot speak with much detail about that which has not been revealed to us, but we do know from Jesus' reference to *“the devil and his angels,”* that somehow this particular angel pursued an evil desire within him to have more authority than had been granted to him. When God became aware of that desire in Satan, instead of humbling himself, he decided what many people decide today. *I will take matters into my own hands. I will be in charge!*

So somehow, Satan's influence spread to other angels, perhaps with similar desires. The apostle Paul gives us a little insight into some of this when he wrote to Timothy concerning the elders, in **1 Timothy 3**. In **verse 6**, with reference to the idea that elders *“...must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.”* That is, it would appear that Satan's pride is what led to his downfall, as it does for every person who follows after it.

Everything we read about Satan in the Bible tells us that He is a violent, yet determined enemy. Jesus said he was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). Incidentally, who was murdered at the beginning? He didn't kill Adam and Eve, but he did bring them death. And it wouldn't be many years until their second-born son would lie dead at the hands of his older brother. Now tell me, do you think if Eve had been able to look ahead and see what was going to happen, that her firstborn would kill her second son, do you think a million dollars could have enticed her to eat that fruit? Never in a million years!

Peter likens Satan to *a roaring lion seeking someone to devour*. He is known as the deceiver. He is spoken of as a serpent, and a dragon. He is called the accuser, the tempter, the devil, and that old serpent. **Revelation 9:11** speaks about one who is the angel of the bottomless pit, a being named *Abaddon* in the Hebrew, *Apollyon* in Greek, which means “destroyer.”

But if we wish to see Satan's true evil nature and power, let us go once again to the 3rd chapter of Genesis, where we spent some time this morning. I want you to spend some time thinking about the kind of being that would do what Satan did in the form of that serpent.

Imagine a person who would take advantage of a small child, deceiving them, enticing them, and finally doing the most unimaginable things to that child. Imagine that and then you will

have some idea of what that encounter at the fountainhead of history must have been like. Someone might say, but Eve was no young child. That is true, but she was more innocent than any child has ever been. And what was Satan's goal? It was to destroy her, and through her then to destroy her husband. His plan was to destroy the works of God before they could even get off to a good start. He knew what God had told them, that they were not to eat of the fruit of that one tree. So where did he position himself? He went immediately to that tree and awaited their coming.

Now think about it, you know that many women would not even get close to a snake, if that is what was intended by the word serpent. They wouldn't even get close to one, let alone engage in a conversation with it. Do you see why I say, imagine here we have beings whose minds were more innocent than that of a small child? Jesus said the devil was a liar and a murderer from the beginning. That was his goal. He wanted to see these very first beings, freshly made in the image of God, to be destroyed. He hates life, and loves death, and so his plan is to get these two souls to disobey God and then suffer the penalty of death. Oh how he must have anticipated that moment when the guilty pair paid with their lives. Oh how he must have laughed that devilish laugh, when realizing what they had done, ran and hid themselves among the trees and bushes of the garden. Can you not imagine him giving forth a victor's cry when they took that first bite of the fruit? YES!

It is hard to imagine anyone more evil, malicious, despicable, and cruel. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul says that Satan deceived Eve by his cunning. He lies to them. He cajoles, entices, he assures them they are going to be just fine, in fact, he tells them they will be like God. He wins their confidence, and watches them go for the fruit with absolutely no remorse or shame. No mercy, no compassion for what is about to come crashing down upon them. He just baits the hook and then patiently waits for them to bite.

What kind of being could do something like that? Think of the most depraved and cruel person you have ever heard about and multiply that by a million times and you may still not know the depth of evil that was in that old serpent. Why? Why? Why would he do that? Well, Jesus put it this way: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* Do you understand that if you do not listen to God, if you do not let Christ truly be your Lord, this is what you have to look forward to? Satan has one desire for you, and that is to destroy you. Think about it, what happened to Job's children after Satan was given permission to afflict Job with trouble? What happened to the swine immediately after Jesus gave the demons permission to enter them? What happened to Judas not long after Satan entered his heart? Satan has an insatiable lust for death and destruction; especially for that which belongs to the Lord or bears His image.

This past week I ran across these words in the Daily Bible reading. **Isaiah 48:17-19** reads: ...

Think about that! *If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your well-being like the waves of the sea.* Contrast that with what the deceiver wants for you. Jesus said he only comes only to steal, kill and destroy!

Let's get back to the mystery, and there is a great mystery here, but thank God, with the light of the New Testament, we can see that dragon for what he truly is. Some may think of him as an angel of light, but we know better. Paul said, "*we are not ignorant of his devices* [schemes]."

And so with baited breath, Satan watches as Adam and Eve pull the fruit from the forbidden tree, and then put it to their mouths. One can just imagine the sadistic thrill it must have given him as he watched them do that. But whatever elation he received from seeing the first human sin being committed against God, it must have been short-lived. He must have been ecstatic as he watched them run in absolute fear to hide from the Lord. He slinks near to them while they wait in total fear! He doesn't want to miss a second of what is about to happen. But then, contrary to all of his devilish hopes, instead of seeing God immediately cast them down to hell, or at least pour out his wrath upon them, he hears God simply ask them if they had eaten of the forbidden fruit, and why?

They do not fall over dead. There is no ball of fire falling from heaven to consume them. Instead, God speaks to them the things I spoke about this morning, making it quite clear that they are not going to die; they will go on living. Yes, from now on, it will not be in the garden. From now on it is going to be hard. From now on it is going to be painful and miserable, but as God speaks to them, He makes it clear that their situation is not hopeless. He even makes some garments for them out of animal skins, so they can cover their nakedness. Perhaps that is where the practice of animal sacrifice begins; not as a remedy for sin but as a sign pointing forward to that Lamb that one day would take away the sins of the world. As we read from Paul's letter to the Romans this morning, God passed over the sins, waiting until that time when He could demonstrate ever so clearly His righteousness, and so he could be both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Christ Jesus.

Things did not at all turn out as Satan had expected. Furthermore, God's word to him made it clear that it was his days that were numbered. We read at the beginning, Revelation 12:12: *12) "For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, **knowing that he has only a short time.**"*

God told the serpent that the time would come when the woman's seed would bruise his head, which meant, deal him a death blow. He might bruise that son's heel, but that would not in any way keep Him from fulfilling His divine mission. Please open your Bibles to **1 John 3, and look at verse 8.** John tells us, "*Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*" Do you see that? Do you see what John says was the reason for Jesus' coming? *To destroy the works of the devil.* How did He do that? Look at **verse 5:** "*You know*

that he appeared to take away sins, and in him there is no sin." That's how Christ destroyed the works of the devil, by taking away our sins.

Imagine Satan's reaction to this amazing turn of events. He surely was enraged as well as shocked! How could God not do what He said would happen if Adam and Eve ate of that fruit? He had every reason to believe that he had won that round. What he did not know, what even he would not understand until it was too late, was that God had a plan that would result in forgiveness, not just for this first pair, but for the multiplied millions who would come after them.

What would become clear, or at least clearer, in the fulfillment of those words, was certainly in those first words spoken to both the serpent and to that first pair. Just HOW that would happen, and just how the world would go from the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Gethsemane, and that hillside called Golgotha, all of that would take many thousands of years to unfold. Do you see what this is [THE BIBLE]? It is a detailed explanation of this "mystery of God!" Don't you want to know this story? You should, because it is a story that concerns you.

I want you to see, and I want you to understand, that rather than simply being a record of man's first sin, what is written for us here in Genesis 3 is really the opening scene in this "mystery of God." This mystery reached its climax outside an empty tomb in Jerusalem, and will be complete when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet. In the meantime, although he has already been defeated, he isn't giving up. He continues to wage war against us.

It is critical that you understand, Satan knows you. He knows where you live. He knows HOW you live and his only desire for you is to destroy you, and the only way he can do that is to get you to sin and to not pay any attention to what the NT calls, the gospel. He's already got you to sin. That's done, so now his only hope is to somehow turn you away from gospel and from God's kingdom. Are you going to let him do that? THINK ABOUT IT! ARE YOU GOING TO LET HIM DO THAT?

Satan knows God has prepared a place for him and his angels. People, we need to rid ourselves forever of the notion that somehow Satan is the ruler of hell, that he is going to walk among his angels and the unnumbered souls that will spend eternity there, oblivious to the torment. That isn't true. That is a place prepared for him, and as Revelation 12:12 says, he knows he only has a short time until he is going to be confined there for all of eternity.

Satan also knows that Christ has gone to prepare a place for you. It is far different place than that other. It is a place where his evil influence is absolutely neutralized. In that place, there will be no more temptation, no more sin, no more death and dying; no more sickness and sorrow, pain and problems. What it will really be like is part of the mystery that we do not know at this time, but we do know this much, it is Satan's ambition to take you down to hell with him and to keep you from an eternity with God.

Fortunately in Christ you are no longer his slave to do with whatever he pleases. James tells us that we can resist him and he will flee from us; not because we are such a fearsome opponent to him, but because the one in whom we were baptized has defeated him and there is little he can do to destroy us. Resist him, firm in your faith, Peter says. Hold on to your faith in God, and in His Son. Do not sow to the flesh, but rather, sow to the spirit. Stay firm in your faith, firm in your commitment. Do not wander away from the flock. Do not listen to the siren voices of the world telling you of other ways to go. Do not trust your own wisdom, but listen to God. Get in His Word, and stay in His Word. *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.”*