

Jesus Came To ... Destroy the Works of the Devil

1 John 3:8

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on 12/18/2011

Introduction

- ❖ Have you ever gone over to visit some friends and happen to show up right in the middle of a movie they're watching? Everyone is so engrossed in the film that they don't want to pause to catch you up, so you sit there for the next hour confused trying to piece the story together.
 - *"I think he's supposed to be the hero and she's the love interest. That's probably the bad guy. But I have no idea what he's talking about or what they're trying to do."* It's hard to figure out what's going on when you walk into the middle of a story.

- ❖ Unfortunately, that's what Christmas is like for many people. Jesus' birth doesn't happen until about two-thirds into the Bible. So if all you hear is the Christmas story, then I can imagine you'd be a bit confused. You can probably figure out that Jesus is the main character, but beyond that you have no idea what happened earlier and no idea where the story is going.
 - That's why, this Advent season, we've been asking the question, "***Why did Jesus come?***" We've looked at passage that explicitly tell us his reason for coming that first Christmas morning. Today's text says that "*the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.*" Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

- ❖ Now how is that for some Christmas cheer? **Jesus came to destroy. Christmas is about destruction.** If this doesn't sound like good news to you, then you're missing *the reason for the season*. That's why I'm excited to tell you the big story from start to finish.
 - Normally it's our practice in this church to preach sermons where we walk carefully through passages, explaining and applying the text. But this morning I want to do something different. I want to take a step back and look at the big picture of the Bible and to trace this theme of '*Jesus destroying the works of the devil*' all the way from Genesis to Revelation. I want to consider the big story.

- ❖ I don't know if you've ever thought of it this way, but **Christmas is basically an origin story of a hero who grows up and one day goes on an adventure to rescue a bride from the grips of an evil dragon who has been terrorizing the land for centuries.**
 - Sure, it sounds like a fairytale. But think about this: *Why is it that all fairytale stories sound alike?* They all have a hero, a damsel in distress, an adversary, a big battle, etc. What if these stories were inspired by an original story that's been written into our hearts? So that when we hear the story of Christ something resonates within us.

- ❖ Shortly after his conversion to Christianity, **C.S. Lewis** wrote to a friend explaining that another good friend, J.R. Tolkien, was instrumental in helping him see that the story of Christ is simply a true fairytale story. Just like any fairytale, the story of Christ fills you with wonder and awe. It draws you in. It works on your heart and imagination the same way as other fairytales, but with this tremendous difference – *it really happened.*
 - Friends, lend me your ears and I'll tell you the old, old story of an ancient enemy who ruled with terror over a race of slaves but was finally defeated by a hero of humble origin but born of a kingly line. It's a story – but one that really happened.

The Devil's Presence

- ❖ If you're following along in your outline, this story has five chapters. The first is called The Devil's Presence. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 1, and we'll read a very familiar verse. **Genesis 1:1** "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" Our story begins in the beginning with a self-existent, eternal God through whom everything was made including every living thing that fills the earth. And it was good.
 - And we're told that out of all living creatures, God made man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (1:27) The Bible says God also created a race of beings called 'angels' to minister to man (Heb. 1:14). God looked upon all that he made and called it 'very good'.

- ❖ In Genesis 2, God places the first man and woman in a garden to tend it, and he institutes the first marriage joining the couple as one flesh. If you were a first-time reader of Scripture, at this point everything looks perfect. **We have a loving Creator God, a beautiful, blameless couple, and a fruitful garden.** God, man, and creation all living in harmony.

- ❖ But, in the first verse of Genesis 3, we realize that all is not well. An evil presence has been lurking about. Read with me, "*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.*" (3:1) A host of questions suddenly arise: *Who is this serpent? Where did he come from? Is he part of God's 'very good' creation?*
 - **The New Testament identifies the serpent as the devil.** For example, **Revelation 12:9** talks about the "ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan (*adversary*)". It also describes him as a great dragon who was thrown down.

- ❖ From various places in Scripture we can deduce that something happened between God declaring all of creation to be 'very good' and Genesis 3:1. We're told that a war broke out in heaven (Rev. 12:7). A company of angels rebelled against God, led by Satan, an angel himself (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).
 - Now stop and think about that: Satan is an angel. Angels are creatures. Therefore Satan is a creature. Don't overlook the the last five words of Genesis 3:1, "*that the LORD God had made*". God made the serpent! He made Satan!
 - Satan is not the *yin* to God's *yang*. He is not the antithesis of God. He is powerful but in no way equal to God. He's a creature just as we are creatures.

- ❖ And we're told in **Isaiah 14** that this creature was so filled with pride that he wanted to make himself "*like the Most High*" (14:14). So a war ensued, but Revelation 12 says the devil and his angels were defeated and "thrown down" to earth. The battle in heaven was over but the war continued. The battleground just shifted to earth where the blameless couple was enjoying fellowship with God in the Garden.

The Devil's Attack

- ❖ Chapter Two: The Devil's Attack. **If he can't touch God, then the devil will go after those he loves.** But his attack wont be with fangs or weapons but with deceptive words.

- The devil is shrewd. To kill the couple would certainly hurt God, but how much more would it hurt if I can turn them against God? His strategy was to foster in them “*an evil, unbelieving heart leading [them] to fall away from the living God*” (Heb. 3:12).
- ❖ So look at what the serpent says **3:1**, “*He said to the woman, “Did God actually say ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”* Notice he intentionally misquotes God from chapter **2:16**. There God says, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden (except one).*”
 - But the devil knows what he’s doing. **He’s trying to portray God as harsh, restrictive, as a cosmic kill-joy.** He wants to plant seeds of doubt in the woman, so that she starts questioning God’s motives and doubting his goodness.
- ❖ You can already see it in her response in **v2**, “*And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’”*”
 - Notice how, when quoting God, she leaves out the words ‘surely’ and ‘every’. God said you may *surely* (freely) eat of *every* tree, meaning there is a lot of freedom and a lot of goodness available to God’s children. Yet her view has subtly changed.
- ❖ And then she adds the words, “*neither shall you touch it.*” Now God never said you can’t touch the tree. That addition is indicative of a view of God that is harsh and unreasonable. And notice how she emphasizes the location of the tree “*in the midst of the garden*”. She assumes its location means it’s special. It’s God’s best, and yet he is holding it back from me.
 - The serpent has poisoned her mind with a venomous lie. With just one question, he got her to question if God really loves her, if he really has her best in mind.
- ❖ **Friends, this is the oldest lie, and it continues to poison our hearts to this day.** How often do we wonder, “*If God really loves me, then why does he restricts my freedom with his laws? Are his ways really the best? Could it be that by following his ways I am actually missing out on something better?*” This kind of thinking is actually satanic.
 - But for the woman, the poison has set deep, and sensing the opportunity, the serpent strikes. He goes on in **v4** to say openly what she was probably already thinking – that the only reason God is holding back this tree is because he doesn’t want to share the joy of being God. “*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*”
- ❖ **Now what’s wrong with knowing good and evil?** Why would God keep that from them? Well ancient readers would have understood that the expression “*the knowledge of good and evil*” is referring to a type of knowledge that confers independence and autonomy
 - In **Deuteronomy 1:39**, prior to entering the Promised Land, Moses reminds the Israelites that the former generation died in the wilderness because they refused to trust God and enter the first time. But God had promised that your “*little ones ... your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there.*”

- ❖ So children don't have this knowledge, in the sense that they're not independent and autonomous from their parents and the decisions their parents make. That's why those children were not held accountable for not going in the first time.
- ❖ So to possess this knowledge is not just about knowing what is right and wrong BUT deciding what is right and wrong. **Vaughan Roberts says the couple wasn't just guilty of law-breaking but of law-making.**¹ They were trying to usurp God's authority. They were trying to "*be like God*" – to create their own laws and live independently of him.
 - Unbelief had set in. They lost their faith in God's kingly rule and fatherly provision. Chapter 3:6 says the woman looked at the tree, it was a delight to her eyes, so she took and ate, and also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate.
- ❖ And the bottom fell out. Suddenly they were alienated from each other, alienated from creation, and alienated from God. We witness an immediate decline in morality. Chapter 4 records history's first murder.
 - Chapter 5 records a genealogy that goes from Adam to Noah, and one key phrase keeps popping up: "*and he died, and he died, and he died.*" Starting in Genesis 3, sin, death, and the devil begin their ugly reign over humanity.
- ❖ **Hebrews 2:14-15 says we have all been subjected to lifelong slavery by the devil through our fear of death.** Everyone fears death, even the toughest of men. Maybe some aren't scared of dying itself, but everyone, if we're honest, is fearful of what might come next.
 - **The Bible says it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment** (Heb. 9:27). After we die, we will face a Holy Judge who will hold us accountable for every ill-spoken word, every selfish thought, every hurtful action.
- ❖ And in the context of this heavenly courtroom, the devil wields the power of death over us. **His power is an accusatory power.** That's why the Bible calls him an '*accuser*' (Rev. 12:10). He's an expert at God's law. He's had thousands of years to study it, so he knows it well and knows how to use it against you. He'll come at you hard. He'll throw the book at you. And the evidence will be there, so he has an airtight case.
 - But until that day comes, his goal is to lull you into a state of complacency. To distract you with enough toys and hobbies to keep you from contemplating your death and what comes next. He wants you to think you're free, while in reality you're enslaved to him. He holds humanity in his grips like a great dragon guarding a princess in a tower. He's the ultimate bad guy.

The Devil's Defeat (Declared)

- ❖ But all is not lost. In Chapter Three of our story we see a glimmer of hope. The devil's eventual defeat is declared. It's only a prophesy for a future day, but it is a sure promise.

¹ Vaughan Roberts, *God's Big Picture*, 39.

- ❖ The devil thought he won the war. He was able to deceive God's Beloved and turn the couple against him. They joined the dark side, if you will. He walked away, head high, in victory. But then the LORD God speaks and proclaims what has been called the *protoevangelium*, which means 'the first gospel'.
 - In **Genesis 3:15**, God says, "*I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*"

- ❖ Notice three declarations. **First, he declares enmity between the serpent and the woman.** In the beginning of the chapter, the woman and the serpent were friendly to each other. She was convinced he had her best in mind. But now the Lord declares that enmity will come between them. In one fell swoop, the Lord takes away the devil's first ally.

- ❖ **Second, the Lord declares enmity between the serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring.** Some think the Bible is talking about a natural suspicion or dislike that humans have always had of snakes. That's not it. We're talking about a battle on earth between two lines of progeny. There is only one human race, but a spiritual distinction is being made between the offspring of the woman and that of the devil. Now by 'devil's offspring', we don't mean the devil is going to father a bunch of children. We're talking about all those who share in the works of the devil. Those are his children.
 - If you look back at **1 John 3:8**, it says, "*Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.*" And in **v10**, John says you can tell the children of God apart from the children of the devil by looking to see who makes a practice of sinning.

- ❖ So everyone who continues to resist God, who continues in a persistent pattern of sinning (just like the devil) is considered his offspring. And they are locked in a perpetual battle with a line of descendants who do the opposite, who trust God and practice righteousness.
 - You see this battle being played out from Genesis 3 on. Cain, representing the devil's offspring, kills Abel, representing the woman's. We meet Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc. and read of the conflict and opposition they faced.

- ❖ But just as you think this is leading up to an epic battle between two armies of descendants, we keep reading **v15** and find a twist, "*he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*" **The twist is the sudden shift to singular pronouns.** "*He shall bruise your head.*"

- ❖ **God's third declaration is that a champion will one day rise from the line of the woman to defeat the serpent once and for all.** This champion will represent the woman's offspring on the battlefield and fight on their behalf. He will face the ancient dragon alone.
 - Think of young David venturing onto the battlefield to face Goliath alone. He represents the entire army of Israel. The way the battle worked was that the champion's victory would be considered a victory for his entire army. So if David wins, then the army of Israel wins.

- ❖ **In the same way, God promises that this offspring of the woman will one day crush the ancient dragon, and his victory will be a victory for the rest of her offspring.** But our hero will have to suffer a great wound in the process. *“He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”*
- ❖ *Now the ‘you’ is obviously referring to the serpent, but who is the ‘He’?* That’s the big question. In fact, the rest of the Bible was written to answer that very question. But at this point in history, in Genesis 3, no one knew who the ‘He’ would be – not even the devil.
 - I love how **Martin Luther** put it, *“God never told the devil who ‘He’ would be. The devil lived in dread of every woman’s son who was a believer because he never knew who ‘He’ might be.”*
- ❖ That is why throughout the Bible you see baby boys being targeted. The devil incited Pharaoh to kill the baby boys of Israel (Ex. 1:16). Later, the devil tempted Israel to adopt the cultic practices of her pagan neighbors which included child sacrifice. And in the NT, he got King Herod to murder every male child in Bethlehem two years old or under (Mt. 2:16). Satan was going after the boys. **He was trying to kill the ‘He’ before he could grow up and crush his head.** He knew his time was running short.

The Devil’s Defeat (Delivered)

- ❖ The Devil’s Presence. The Devil’s Attack. The Devil’s Defeat Declared. And now we’re caught up in the movie. Now the Christmas story has a background to it. Now it make sense where everything is going. Chapter Four: The Devil’s Defeat Delivered.
 - **For thousands of years, God’s people waited and waited for this hero to arise.** Some thought they found a hero in Moses. Some thought Joshua. Others figured it was King David. But none of them panned out. All of them fell short to some degree.
- ❖ But then, *“when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law”* (Gal. 4:4-5). **The ‘He’ was prophesied to deliver God’s people and defeat the dragon, would be God Himself!**
 - The Second Person of the Trinity, the eternal Son of God – very God of very God, begotten, not made – he came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit, of the virgin Mary, and was made man.
 - He was appropriately named Jesus, which means *“The LORD Saves”*, because that’s why he came. **He came to save his Bride, to rescue his Church, from the grips of his ancient foe.**
- ❖ Immediately, he begins to wrest control away from the devil. We see him casting out evil spirits, healing diseases, raising the dead and forgiving sins. **These are just glimpses of sin’s curse and the devil’s foul work being reversed.** These are small skirmishes being won by our hero, but he is gearing up for a bigger and final showdown.
 - But before that day arrives, the serpent strikes again as he did in the Garden. Early in his ministry, Jesus is led out into the wilderness where he is tempted by the devil.

- ❖ And just like before, the serpent attacks with deceptive words. The lies were different, but the temptations were materially the same as before. He was trying to foster a heart of unbelief in the goodness and love of God.
 - This is most clearly seen in his third temptation. That is when he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world if only he would fall down and worship (Mt. 4:8-9). Think about what he was offering. **Satan was willing to hand over his power – to surrender his reign of terror over the earth.** Jesus could then establish his earthly kingdom and sit upon the throne without a shot being fired.
 - **The devil is offering Jesus everything God promised his Son, yet with one big difference. He offers it without a cross.** Jesus can have it all without having to die a brutal, shameful death. *“If God really loves you, why would he subject you to such unnecessary pain and suffering? Take my offer.”*

- ❖ Commenting on this temptation, **Russell Moore** make a great point.² He says if Jesus accepted, that would mean the immediate cease of all war and violence. Jesus would be on the throne, so that means no more hunger, no more poverty, no more slavery. All diseases would be wiped out. All the horrible events in human history since that day would have never happened. There would be no more broken marriages, no more aborted and abandoned children, no more broken families. It sounds like paradise, doesn't it?

- ❖ Moore goes on to say that Satan was willing to give all of this up because he doesn't fear a Christian kingdom on earth ruled with Christian values and behaviors. **He doesn't fear Christianity. He fears Christ, especially Christ's ability and willingness to shed his blood as an atonement for sin.**
 - Remember Satan's accusatory power only works if there is unforgiven sin to accuse. So he is quite comfortable with peace on earth, as long as he can wreak havoc in the courtroom of heaven. **He'll put up with paradise on earth, as long as he gets to condemn humanity with no shed blood of a Savior to redeem them.** He is willing to offer Jesus everything as long as he bypasses the cross.

- ❖ Now the devil's lies worked on the First Man. But not this Man. Unlike Adam who remained silent while the serpent tempted his wife, Jesus spoke up and shut the serpent's mouth with the Word of God. **The Last Adam succeed exactly where the First Adam failed.**
 - And then he set his face like a flint towards Jerusalem. And for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising its shame (Heb. 12:2). And on the third day he rose from the grave victorious, triumphing over sin, death and the devil.

- ❖ And so we read in **Colossians 2:13-15**, *“God made us alive together with [Jesus], having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rules and authorities and put them to open shame, triumphing over them in him (in Christ).”*

² Russell Moore, *Tempted and Tried*, 152.

- ❖ On the cross, Christ our champion met the enemy alone and fought on our behalf. There he took our sins upon himself and made atonement through his death. In so doing, he disarmed the devil. **By taking away sin, the devil is powerless against God's people.** The metaphorical tower where we were kept has been knocked down. Our metaphorical chains have fallen off. We've been set free. Jesus has destroyed the works of the devil.

The Devil's Destruction

- ❖ There is one last chapter to be fulfilled. Chapter Five: The Devil's Destruction. **Because of the cross, we can say that the works of the devil *have already been destroyed*, but in another sense, his works are *not yet destroyed*.**
 - Notice how God did not immediately snuff out the devil. Instead, he has been permitted to prowl the earth, like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:9), that is, anyone who will still fall for his lies.
- ❖ But he's a marked man. Just as there is a period of time between a death penalty verdict and the actual execution, the devil awaits his certain fate and will try to inflict as much damage as he can until his time is up.
 - And one day it will be up. God gives us a glimpse into the future in **Revelation 20:10** where it says, "*the devil who had deceived [the saints] was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur ... and [he] will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*"
- ❖ And upon his final destruction, God will make all things new (Rev. 21:5). He will bring a new heaven down to a new earth. He will dwell with man and they will be his people. "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*" (21:4)
 - **The Paradise and fellowship that man experienced with God in the Garden will be reestablished, but the big difference is that in this coming kingdom, sitting on the throne will be a bloody Lamb, our champion, our victor.**

Conclusion

- ❖ *Do you see the glory of Christmas – the story of Christ and his coming? Does it make more sense now? It's a true fairytale story about a hero, a captured bride, a dragon, and an epic battle on a wooden cross.* It's a story that really happened, and we celebrate it again this Christmas season.
- ❖ Friends, are you a part of Jesus' Bride, his people that he came to rescue from the dragon's grip? Have you called out to the Lord's champion in faith and joined his side? If not, then I urge you to do so today.
 - And if Jesus is your champion, your Savior, then walk freely and confidently in his victory. If you are in Christ, then his victory has been counted as your victory. So take up the shield of faith to extinguish any arrow of accusation the devil might fire at you and throw off the fear of death for you have Jesus on your side. Live in light of your Savior's victory!