

Sermon 41: The downfall of satan

OUTLINE

An angry but defeated enemy
A harassed but preserved people

INTRODUCTION

The Christian life is complicated. Our experience of the world in God's plan is nuanced and a proper understanding of it is vital to our comprehending our experience in this world. Chapter 12 is written to Christians who are under fire, they are experiencing some of the most satanic opposition God's people have ever faced in the self-deifying reign of terror of Roman Emperors like Domitian. When the suffering is never ending you need perspective to help you understand what is happening. Chapter 12 provides this. This chapter describes two realities, a very angry defeated enemy and a harassed but preserved people. This double emphasis explains the truth that Jesus is real, He is the Christ, He has conquered yet we still do not see the final victory. The best illustration I have heard to account for these apparently contradictory truths is the difference between D Day and V Day. The day the allied forces stormed the beaches of Normandy they broke the back of Hitler's power in Europe, it was the turning point in the war, but it was not until V Day that Germany was finally overcome. This tension is created in the first part of the chapter when we see the dragon attempting to overcome the Man-Child, but Christ arises victorious to take His throne and rule. But there seems to be an anti-climactic note struck when just after this victory we see the mother fleeing for her life into the wilderness. V7-17 explores this tension.

An angry but defeated enemy

The effect of Christ's mediatorial work is shown as a battle in the heavens. V7-8, 'Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven.' There are various scriptures which indicate that the devil had access to God's throne room, Job 1-2, Zech. 3, etc. His roles of provoking and accusing are cut off and brought to an end. V9 amplifies the victory and its significance in light of Gen. 3, 'And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world---he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.' The dragon is linked with the serpent in the Garden. He is also called the devil and satan which mean slanderer and adversary. These refer to his legal roles in accusing and opposing the people of God. But he is also described as the deceiver of the whole world. In this sense he is the strongman who holds the nations under lies, but now the strongman has been bound, and his house can now be ransacked, and God speaks the light of the gospel into the darkness of men's unbelief as He spoke light into being in the beginning, 2 Cor. 4:4.

V10-12 draws out the implications of this defeated enemy. You will notice that a clean victory with an ended war is not the result but an ongoing conflict against a defeated foe. 'And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"'

Salvation has come because Christ as the sinbearer of His people has paid in full for their sins and criminals can now be forgiven and saved.

Power has come because the power of Christ's resurrection is the beginning of the New creation and overflows into our lives in regeneration. The powers of the age to come are presently being realised.

Kingdom and authority are realised by Christ becoming the King and taking up His authority over the universe in the seat of the Second Adam to rule over all of God's creation. Where Adam failed to crush the serpent's head and create a garden for God's glory Christ is doing and will do so.

The main indication of this change is that the accuser is removed from the court room of heaven and can no longer accuse. This is the real victory over satan for he had no power but the power of our sins over us, this gave him the power of death as he sued God for the justice that our sins deserved. However, with all of our sins fully paid for by Christ there is no ammunition for the accuser, he is now jobless in this regard and cannot accuse us to God but only falsely accuse us to ourselves. Paul speaks of this great victory in Rom. 8:33-34, 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died---more than that, who was raised---who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.'

V11 spells out the victory and notice that it is we who are emphasized as having the victory. We overcome him by the blood of the lamb. How does blood overcome satan? It is not a holy water that burns him when we plead the blood. The blood indicates the life Christ gave in payment and propitiation for our sins. Blood covered the mercy seat to show that death had been paid to make up for the broken commandments inside the Ark of the Covenant. Likewise the Christian is sprinkled with the blood as a testimony that Christ's life has been given as payment to fulfil the law on our behalf.

By the word of our testimony. This involves 2 things. Firstly, it involves a faithful holding to the testimony that Jesus is the Saviour and not denying Him even in the face of death. Secondly, the word we preach is the very sword of the Spirit by which more souls are plundered from satan's household.

And by us not loving our lives unto death. This indicates 2 things. Firstly, the devil accused God of bribing Job for his loyalty, but God showed His worth in Job's eyes when He allowed satan to remove his health and wealth. We declare the worth of God when we are willing to lose all of life to serve Him in faithfulness. And secondly, death becomes a door by which we escape His grasp. It is not death to die but overcoming every enemy and entering our rest.

Verse 12 highlights the tension we now live in, 'Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!'" The war is won but we now face in the remaining battles an adversary that is cornered, wounded and who knows his days are numbered. He will show no mercy and use every trick in the book to try and overcome us. The security of our heavenly place is assured but the world is going to become a very bloody battle ground as he takes out his anger on the church. So when you see Christians overrun, or your own life unsettled remember these things. You live in a war zone, you face an angry and determined foe, but He is defeated and nothing that we encounter can undo what Christ has done, He holds the keys, and the victory will finally come.

A harassed but preserved people

This turning from waging war on Christ to the church is indicated in v13, 'And when the dragon saw that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.' And what will become of the church? V14, 'But the woman was given the two wings of the great eagle so that she might fly from the serpent into the wilderness, to the place where she is to be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time.' Here we have the thought of the church's preservation repeated. The idea of being given eagles wings reminds us of other connections between wings and God's care. Deut. 32:10-11, '

"He found him in a desert land,
and in the howling waste of the wilderness;
he encircled him, he cared for him,
he kept him as the apple of his eye.

¹¹ Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions,'

We have already spoken about how the wilderness should recall the sustaining of Israel and Elijah in their plight.

But notice the reference to time, 'she is to be nourished for a time, times and half a time.' That is 3 ½ years, or 42 months, or 1260 days. Many have thought that this applies somehow to the tribulation which will occur at some future date after a rapture. This however is impossible, look back at 12:7. Here we see that directly after Jesus ascends the devil wages war, the church flees and she is nourished indicating that the 1260 days began at the ascension. This is a symbolic reference to the period of time where the devil is waging war against the saints after the fashion of Daniel 7. This period will come to an end with the second coming of Christ. The significance of it is that it is a delineated and restricted period of time that will come to an end and result in victory for Christ with the total overcoming of all His enemies and the emancipation of the church.

V15 portrays the devil's attempts to overcome the church as a flood of water from its mouth. This may be a reference to the power of satan's tongue to deceive and mislead mankind against the church. Rev. 17:1 speaks of Babylon sitting on many waters, i.e. many

nations, this is a likely meaning here. But just as the earth was said to open up and devour Pharaoh rescuing Israel in Ex. 15:12 so the earth opens up to rescue the Church. The devil wages war but God providentially intervenes and preserves His people. the devil is bound for this period and cannot have his way with the church.

V17 is a summary verse, 'Then 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. And he stood on the sand of the sea.' Having attempted to make war against the offspring of the woman, the Man-Child Christ and not being able to succeed the devil turns against the church. Scary but the victory is a foregone conclusion. Notice how the Christian is described during all of this. 'those who keep the commandments of God' and 'hold to the testimony of Jesus.' Holy obedience and faithful perseverance in witness, this is how we are to run during this time of war.