

Genesis 3 & Matthew 4

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[0 : 00] In the New Testament we're told that the devil is the adversary of those who trust in Jesus Christ and that he goes about like a lion seeking whom he may devour.

We can read about that in the scriptures themselves and the history of the Christian church right down to our own day also bears that out.

The devil is still the adversary of God's people and he goes about seeking people to devour, to destroy.

So I'd like to think this evening about Satan. Not that he really deserves a special place in our thinking.

We must think about him because he is a reality, because of what he does. But if we look at the whole of scripture and then look at what scripture says about Satan, about the devil, it is really a very small part.

[1 : 15] And as we go through things, perhaps the reason for that will become apparent. Well, the first mention that we have of Satan is in Genesis chapter 3.

We read there about the serpent who persuaded Eve to disobey God. And many people, of course, would say, well, that's just a fairy story.

It's just a myth. It didn't happen like that. Serpents don't speak. Well, when we were in Peru, they had a belief in the jungle in the Moyabamba area that the biggest poisonous snake there sang.

Now, what the ins and outs of that are, I don't know. Who was this serpent?

Is this just a fairy story? Well, when we come to the book of the Revelation, there in chapter 12, we see that the great red dragon, who was at war with God and at war with God's people in this world, that he is that ancient serpent and the devil.

[2 : 48] You might say then, well, that's the book of Revelation. And it's got lots of very colourful pictures. We can't really take it that the serpent in the story of the temptation of Eve is Satan.

Well, we can go to John chapter 8 and there at verse 44 or 43, Jesus says to his opponents who refused to listen to him, they heard him, but they refused to take what he said on board.

He said to them, why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.

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 or originator of lies.

And that very clearly is a reference to what took place as we read about it in Genesis 3. We don't really learn anything about the origin of Satan in Genesis chapter 3.

[4 : 29] But when we come to the book of the Revelation there, we gather some information. It seems that he was an angel of very high rank, perhaps even of the highest rank.

Somehow or other, he wasn't satisfied with what God had made him, and he wanted to take the place of God. He drew other angels with him into his rebellion.

But this rebellion failed, and Satan was cast out of heaven. Now the same Satan who rebelled, who tempted Eve, who appears in the figure of the great red dragon, is the same Satan who exists today.

So he has experience from the whole of history as to how to best go about his work. In the account of Jesus' temptation in the Judean wilderness, we see Satan as a real, personal, intelligent, moral, but evil being.

His aim in tempting Jesus was to get Jesus to stop trusting in God the Father.

[6 : 02] To stop doing what God the Father sent him to do. What he wants Jesus to do is to launch out on his own, independently of the Father.

Do things his own way. And not continue to believe and to trust the Father.

That is what he did in the Garden of Eden. Had God really said, you're not to eat any of the fruit of the trees in the Garden, he must really be mean to prohibit all of that.

Of course, it was a lie. But the suggestion was there. And when Eve said that, no, God hadn't said that, but he had forbidden one tree, and it was dangerous to touch it because they would die if they did.

He denied it flatly. You won't die. It's not true. God's telling you lies. God is holding out on you.

[7 : 12] He knows that when you eat that fruit, you'll be on the same level as him. You'll be like God. And she believed him.

And when she did what he suggested, she found out that it was a lie. And the great revelation that was to take place when they ate the fruit turned out to be the knowledge of the fact that they were both naked.

That was it. But their relationship with God had been destroyed. Death, through that disobedience, came into human experience.

Sin became a part of a human nature, and sin and death have ruled all the way down to our own day.

So no wonder Jesus referred to him as a murderer and as a liar. And the only thing he said is that he can speak is lies.

[8 : 22] Not necessarily gross lies that are very obvious, but sufficient truth mixed in with lies to get at people.

In the final temptation that we're told about here in Matthew chapter 4, we can see what the devil's real goal was.

It was to replace God with himself. All these kingdoms of the world are mine. I'll give them to you. You won't have to struggle. You won't have to suffer. I'll give them to you. It's in my power to do so. And all you have to do is worship me.

All you have to do is to acknowledge that I am the greatest being that there is. that I am greater than God the Father. Where did Satan come from?

[9 : 36] Well, I can't answer that question. Certainly, I can't explain where the evil being came from.

Originally, the one that we know as Satan was created by God as a perfectly good angel.

In fact, he was created by the Son of God. And this comes out very clearly in the letter to the Colossians.

Where in the first chapter there, the Colossians and ourselves are told the true identity of Jesus. We have it in the Gospels too.

He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn over all creation. And that's got nothing to do with himself being created.

[10 : 43] It's got to do with his being the heir. The firstborn was the heir. The Son of God is the Father's heir. For by him, that is the Son, all things were created.

Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things were created by him and for him.

So Satan was part of the original creation. A good angel. Intelligent, rational, moral, personal, spirit beings.

When God looked at his creation, as we're told at the very beginning of Genesis, he saw that it was all very good. Therefore, there was no place in it or there was no evil being in existence then.

How then did a perfect moral being become an absolutely evil being?

[12 : 04] How did he change? And that's what we don't know. But, like the change that came over Adam and Eve, it must have been in connection with the exercise of free will.

When God made man, he made man able to choose for or or against God. That is absolutely necessary in a personal being.

The freedom to choose. If the freedom to choose is not there, then the being is not personal. The being is pre-programmed.

The being is a robot. God created a man in his own image and likeness. A personal being with the freedom to choose.

Satan obviously chose for himself and not for God. And when he did that, he changed.

[13 : 26] And I'm just deducing that from what happened to Eve and to Adam. They, when they exercised their free will and chose not to love God, not to trust God, not to rely upon God, not to do things God's way, when they chose for themselves instead of God, they changed.

And we can see that change immediately. as soon as God is heard coming as he did to talk with them, a time that they had delighted in before, they ran away into the bushes to hide. They're afraid of God. They're ashamed of God. And when God does call them out and ask them what's going on, nobody says, I'm sorry.

we disobeyed you. Adam blames Eve and he blames God. It's the woman you gave me. Eve blames the serpent.

It wasn't my fault. The serpent deceived me. But the truth of the matter was they chose both of them. It was their choice.

[14 : 46] But they changed. They became alienated from God through the change in their person, in their nature. And they became alienated from one another.

Truth went out the window. And we could assume reasonably, I suppose, that this is the same thing that happened in the case of the angel who became Satan.

He changed. And he changed absolutely. evil being. He became an absolutely evil being.

One implacably opposed to God. And all that God has done and all that God has created. He became someone who desires to harm and to destroy all that God has made and done.

and he particularly hates human beings. Now, you wouldn't think that. All these inducements to disobey God that we're constantly surrounded with, which promise us a fulfillment and happiness, it's all lies.

[16 : 11] And the devil doesn't do it because he's interested in creating a little happiness here and there. Happiness or the promise of it is the bait.

The reality behind the temptation is death. That's what the devil wants for the human race, that they suffer the same fate as he is destined to suffer.

He wants to keep man alienated from God and under God's curse. There's a funny thing about our modern society, in this country in particular.

There are many, many hints of biblical themes in advertising and they're not used to propagate the gospel, but they're there.

And it's very obvious where people are coming from. It's also true that despite what people may make out, this society of errors can also envisage a place of absolute evil.

[17 : 56] evil. And since it's only persons who can be evil, this place must be the abode of an absolutely evil being.

there was a film of a some years ago called Event Horizon and that was at the very centre of the story.

This spaceship had blundered into a universe of absolute evil. I think that that would give folks some idea of the nature of a Satan.

Death and destruction. But aren't good and evil really two sides of the one coin?

Isn't evil coexistent with good? Think of the force in Star Wars films.

[19 : 14] There's the dark side of the force and there's the good side of the force. It's the one force. That's an idea that comes from certain human religions, particularly from the East.

Good and evil are not two sides of the one coin. That's not the reality. We have the reality in God's book.

And there he tells us that he is absolute and eternal. Absolutely and eternally good.

There is no darkness in him. There is no evil or twistedness or lies or malice in God. God is perfectly and absolutely good and he does not change.

He cannot produce evil. It's impossible. Such is his nature. Satan is an absolutely evil being.

[20 : 35] He cannot love. He cannot produce good. He does not desire good. He is absolutely evil.

But he is only a created being, a fallen angel. Sure, he's existed from the moment of his creation.

Sure, his power is vastly greater than that of any human being. But he is still only one of God's creation.

And God is the one who is absolutely sovereign, who works out his purposes according to his own will. We may not understand the way he works them out, but we can rest assured that God does so in such a way that he can never be charged with evil.

Evil is totally alien to his nature. And as far as the devil's activity or scope for action is concerned, we have two very good illustrations in the Old Testament.

[21 : 57] There's the case of Job. And God says to Satan, who appears with the rest of the angels, have you considered my servant Job?

How he is such an outstanding servant of mine. And Satan says, well, you take away all his wealth and his family, and then you'll find out how much he loves you.

And God allowed Satan to do it. Then Satan reappears, and God says to him, well, have you considered my servant Job? How faithful to me he is, even though I allowed you to do all that. And Satan says, hmm, you take away his health and you'll see what he's like. And God permits Satan to do that.

And we have the whole story there of Job's suffering. Now you see, Satan couldn't think of a person loving God for God's own sake.

[23 : 03] He just couldn't think of it. And that's why he was so sure that if God stripped Job of all the benefits that he had given him, Job would show his true colors as an enemy of God.

And then in the book of Zechariah in chapter 3, we have a vision there that Zechariah had of Joshua the high priest standing before God and he was dressed in filthy clothes.

In other words, he was in a totally unsuitable condition to be in the presence of God. And his condition demanded that he be judged and punished and rejected.

And Satan was there and he was accusing Joshua. Now the things that he was accusing Joshua, it would be quite true. Joshua's sinfulness and failure.

But God had a rebuke for Satan. And he rebuked him and he said, this, that's Joshua, is a brand plucked from the burning.

[24 : 14] Yes, this is someone who was on the way to destruction. him. But despite his total unworthiness, I've rescued him. And though Satan's condemnation had a real basis, God had done something which we understand better from the New Testament, whereby he could forgive and accept and make fit for his presence, a sinful human being.

God has a plan of redemption for man.

But there is no plan of redemption for Satan and for his followers, angelic followers. believers. And therefore, he does his absolute best.

And he's got great practice in it and great astuteness in it. He bends his every effort to deceive man. And in the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we read that the good news from God about Jesus Christ, his Son, is veiled to those who are perishing.

And he goes on to say, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[26 : 00] And that's the one thing, most of all, that the devil wants to stop. He wants to stop people hearing the gospel. And if they hear it, he wants to stop them taking it in.

The parable of the good sower or the good seed shows that. He doesn't want people to begin to think about themselves and God, about their sinfulness and lostness and their need of a deliverer, a rescuer, a saviour.

But Satan is only a creature. And when God has determined to bring his truth to bear on an individual, Satan cannot prevent that.

God's word. In the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, and although we say the letter of Paul and the letter of Peter and the letter of John and all that, and the gospel of Mark and so on, the origin of what we read is God the Holy Spirit.

So this is God's word. He writes to the Christians in Ephesus and he says, put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.

[27 : 30] For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

That is, a kingdom of evil presided over by Satan. And this kingdom of evil, evil, working, perhaps not consciously, through sinful human beings in this world's history, has caused the misery and the horror and the suffering about which we know something.

Satan rules, as it were, as the god of this world, as or as the ruler of this world.

And that's how he presented himself to Jesus. All this is mine, and I'll give it to you if you worship me. But he's a usurper. He's not the true ruler of this world.

This world is God's world. Satan's hour of glory came when Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane, brought before the high priest, and then the Roman governor, and sentenced to be crucified.

[28 : 56] And when they arrested him in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' word, or among his words to his captors was, this is your hour and the power of darkness.

Obviously, Satan thought that he gained the victory, that this was his triumph over the Son of God, the only deliverer from death of the human race.

But ironically, what he no doubt conceived as his victory was his defeat. and it's in the letter to the Colossians that we see that stated clearly.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ, writes Paul to the Colossians. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross. In other words, he accepted responsibility for our sin and guilt and underwent the full punishment for it there on the cross, death.

[30 : 31] And then we read, and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

So it was his death on the cross that defeated Satan. Satan since then has been a defeated enemy. But that doesn't mean to say that he is out of the picture. The war has been won, but the battles continue and will continue until the end of time.

We read about them today. The treatment of Christians in many different countries throughout the world. The attempts of governments to stop the church proclaiming the gospel.

We see it in our own country with the rise of all that is antagonistic to Christian values and to the Christian gospel.

[31 : 48] And there are some very bizarre things being said and done. I just saw something the other day.

It was a petition brought to the European Parliament, I think it was, by some particular group within it. I'm not very sure about European things because there's two different sort of Europe's and I get a bit confused.

But anyway, what was being asked through this petition was that creationism or scientific creationism we would call it and what's it called again?

Never mind, I might remember. That these things should be banned from science classes throughout Europe. That they were a terrible danger to European society and if these things were allowed to be taught as if they really were factual, Europe would lose all its hard-won liberties and all the values that we have enjoyed as a civilization.

And I was aghast because the very values that have brought benefit to Europe have come from Christianity. But this was the twist and this is the same opposition.

[33 : 39] At the end of time, whether that comes soon or not so soon, there will be one final attempt to overthrow God.

The man of sin will appear and there will be a concerted and overwhelming gathering of the forces of evil against the people of God.

God and that will result in the coming of the Lord and his destroying of those who have set themselves up against him.

Satan is a loser. I'm not being rude and I'm not being flippant, but that is what Satan is. In the book of the Revelation in chapter 20, we read, and the devil, who deceived all who set themselves against God and his people, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown, and they will be tormented day and night forever.

He is a total loser. He probably is very well aware of it. And what he wants to do is to make people believe that by holding out against God, by rebelling against God and refusing to consider reconciliation with him, that in doing that lies man's best interests.

[35 : 31] But as I said, the devil cannot love. He cannot conceive of good, nor can he desire good for anyone. It's all deceit and lies with a view to destruction.

him. The future lies with those who put their trust in Jesus Christ, who understand why it was he came and did what he did, who understand who he is, who believe the gospel facts, and because of these things, trust him and commit their life to him, to learn from him and to follow him.

And when we come to the end of the book of the Revelation, we read of God's people living in the presence of God, in a new creation, where there is no more sin and therefore no more death nor crying nor sorrow or pain.

Can you imagine it existing without one wicked thought or one selfish thought? Well, that will be the way it will be for all who have put their trust in Christ and go to live in his eternal presence to love and to serve him.

But what about those who are still alienated from God, hostile, disobedient, rejecting? Well, what God has to say to them is this, repent and believe the gospel.

[37 : 17] Be reconciled to me. And in the very last chapter, and it's the fourth last verse of the Bible, we have this, the Spirit, that is the Holy Spirit, and the Bride, that is the Church of Jesus Christ, say to God's enemies, come, come to God, come to Christ, and let him who hears say, come.

Whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. The devil hates.

He can do nothing but that. God loves. And that is why there is a gospel. And as I said this morning, when God brings the truth about his grace and mercy in Jesus Christ, his Son, it's so that we will take it to heart and so that we will respond.

I would suppose that most Christians, I would like to say absolutely everyone, has resisted God for a greater or lesser period.

Some have resisted throughout a long life. but there came the time when God's message by his own grace was listened to and understood and seemed to be good and seemed to be the very thing that was necessary for that individual who by this time realized how desperate his condition was as a sinful human being under God's judgment.

[39 : 20] And so when the gospel was understood, it was something of the greatest delight and to be reconciled to God because of that truth.

There's nothing better than that. So may God bless us in thinking of these truths. The devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour and he can cause great harm and great suffering.

But he isn't God. He doesn't even come anywhere near it. God is sovereign. And as we read in the letter to the Romans, there is nothing that can separate from the love of God all who belong to Jesus Christ, his son.

Let's pray. we thank you, Lord, for your word and for the wonder of your grace. We thank you that you are the sovereign Lord, the Lord God Almighty, and that everyone who puts their trust in you, whatever the suffering or shame or abuse that they might have to suffer in this world, will never find themselves let down by you for your promises that when you begin your work of salvation in any individual's life, you will bring it to perfection and bring those whom you have brought to Jesus Christ into your eternal presence.

Bless this word as it goes out today throughout the world, to the glory of your name and to the salvation of multitudes. And this we ask in Jesus' name.

[41 : 09] Amen.