

*March 1, 2015*

*Matthew 4:1-11: **“Those Who Wanted Jesus to Die: Satan”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In 2009, *the Barna Group* did a nationwide survey of American adults who consider themselves Christian. The survey explored beliefs about spiritual beings, the influence of faith on their life, views of the Bible, and reactions to faiths other than their own. When asked about Satan, *the Barna Group* noted:

Four out of ten Christians (40%) strongly agreed that Satan “is not a living being but is a symbol of evil.” An additional two out of ten Christians (19%) said they “agree somewhat” with that perspective. A minority of Christians indicated that they believe Satan is real by disagreeing with the statement: one-quarter (26%) disagreed strongly and about one-tenth (9%) disagreed somewhat. The remaining 8% were not sure what they believe about the existence of Satan.

Along with this information, there were noted inconsistencies according to *the Barna Group*: “About half (47%) of the Christians who believed that Satan is merely a symbol of evil nevertheless agreed that a person can be under the influence of spiritual forces such as demons.”

What all of this demonstrates is that many who claim to be Christian are either not reading their Bibles or not believing their Bibles. With that in mind, we need to establish the fact that Satan is real. He was an angel who rebelled against God and “who leads the whole world astray (Rev. 12:9).” He is the leader of all other evil angels known as demons.

The name “devil” in the New Testament means “the slanderer.” The name “Satan” means “the adversary.” He is, therefore, as it says in Revelation 12:10, “the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night.” The devil leads us into sin and then slanders us before God. A great example of this is found in Zechariah 3 when Joshua, the high priest, stands before the angel of the Lord, who is the pre-incarnate Son of God. Satan accuses Joshua of his sins, slandering him by stating that he is unworthy to carry out his office. The angel of the Lord says to Joshua, “I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you (Zechariah 3:4).”

It says in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that Satan “masquerades as an angel of light.” In other words, Satan pretends to be something that he is not - all that God is - in order to draw us to himself and his lies. He presents sin to us as something pleasing and beautiful to be desired, and he presents false teaching as enlightening and life-changing. Millions follow his pied piper songs to the river simply because they do not know God’s truth. Jesus describes him in this way in John 8:44, “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 of lies.”

In his attacks on believers, he has a number of willing allies. One is this unbelieving world. It says in 1 John 2:16, “everything in the world - the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world.” The devil uses this unbelieving world to lure Christians away from Christ by the glitter of what it offers - money, power, fame, sex, you

name it. As the unbelieving world hates Christ, it tries to either entice us to follow along or it drives us away by means of persecution. Another ally is that of false teaching and false religion. Paul tells us that the devil and his demons are behind every false religion (2 Corinthians 10:20). He uses them all to deceive us. The most important ally that the devil has against us is our own sinful flesh, or our desires that are contrary to God's desires. Our sinful flesh lures us to follow the devil and flirt with temptation. As it says in James 1:14-15, "Each one is tempted when, by his own evil desires, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

As we see the craftiness, deviousness, and power of the devil and his allies, we cannot help but to recognize that we are no match for him. But, Jesus Christ is. He is both the Son of God and Son of Man. All that he does, he does for us. It is no wonder why **Satan Wants Jesus to Die**. In fact, over the span of human history, Satan has done everything in his power to bring God's plan of salvation to a screeching halt. In a furious rage, he despises the idea that we would be eternal companions of the living God, and so we see in the Bible a record of his attempts to stop God from reaching his objective. But, we also see how God is repeatedly victorious, even when it seems that all is lost.

In our text for this morning, we note that Satan knows who Jesus is. He understands the purpose of Christ's life on this earth, but he focuses on what he perceives to be the key weakness of Jesus - his humanity. Satan tempts Jesus. He tries to place doubt in Jesus, he promises him safety, and he even gives him a destination without suffering. Nevertheless, in the record of our Gospel lesson, our Savior does what Adam and the woman failed to do in the garden of Eden. Christ successfully withstands Satan's temptations and reverses everything. He endures human stress and pain as a part of his redemptive work and payment for our sins. It is no wonder then that Hebrews 4:15-16 says: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

As Satan tempted Jesus with providing for his needs, trying to convince him of the safety, and offering him the destination of "all the kingdoms of the world and their glory," so does he tempt us. All Christ had to do was acknowledge Satan which was much easier route than suffering. And that is all we have to do. Satan emphasizes gain, glory, and self love to minimize the consequences of ungodly behavior. Satan's tactics are the same today.

But whenever we think of Satan, we need to remember that Jesus conquered him. In other words, it would be unwise to over emphasize his power or underestimate his rage. Christ overcame him in the wilderness, throughout his entire life, and especially on the cross where he died for our sins that we might be forgiven. Therefore, our final destination is not one of sin and death. Every time Jesus and the devil clashed - every single time - Jesus was successful. The Bible not only says that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are, but it also says that he remained without sin. And the beautiful thing is that he was successfully fighting Satan for us, so that he could trade his perfect record for our miserable one. He overcomes in order that we might overcome.

Every time you and I have set our trust in God's promises off to the side, Jesus held on to God's promises without wavering. Every time you and I listened to Satan and excused our falls into sin, Jesus cut through the devil's lies and held onto the truth. Every time you and I have failed and taken the easy way out, Jesus stayed the course; all the way to the cross, to render the final crushing blow to Satan - so that our sins could be completely forgiven - so that our every fall into temptation could be erased - so that Satan could never again successfully accuse us before God - that we might reach our destination.

Believing that Jesus has done this for us, we now stand in him. Even though we are tempted by the devil to throw our future away for a moment, Jesus teaches us to believe that we have a future life that is true love. And as we fix our eyes on him and all that he gives, he clearly teaches us how to overcome. We overcome by knowing and holding onto truth when confronted with lies. As we rejoice in knowing that Satan was unable to undermine Christ's determination to be our Redeemer, we do not allow Satan to undermine our desire to be the bride of Jesus. To that end, our Savior shows us how to defeat Satan. We defeat him by knowing and believing God's word.

Lucas Sibanda, a South African was walking along a remote path, minding his own business when a python slithered out from behind some shrubs. Sibanda froze. Within a few seconds the snake had wrapped itself around him and began constricting. Pythons suffocate their victims before swallowing them whole. Sibanda was trapped. He didn't know how he would escape. "I decided the only way to save myself from this monster was to bite it just below the head," Sibanda told the Star newspaper. He bit, he kicked, and he punched the snake until it released him. Sibanda killed the python with a stick, took it home, skinned it, and left it outside his house as proof for people who would otherwise not believe his story.

In the Gospel of Christ, we fight Satan with the same tenacity! We bite with God's Word, we kick with faith in Jesus, we punch with truth until he finally let's go. As it says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you (James 4:7)." We kill Satan with the stick - the stick of the cross, and we take the knife of the resurrection of Jesus and skin it for all to see!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott