**Angels and Demons 8. The Angel of light - R. C. Sproul**

As we come now to the conclusion of our series on angels, there's still much that we need to cover with respect to the activity of Satan. We've already seen that he does not possess divine attributes, that though he's more powerful than we are, he's not omnipotent, though he knows more than we do, he's not omniscient, and he cannot be in more than one place at the same time because he's limited by his own finitude as a creature. We've seen also that he is one who is a liar, that he's clever and crafty, but yet at the same time he's resistible.

Now one of the things that's most often overlooked about the nature of Satan and his activity is his metamorphic character. And when we speak of metamorphosis, we speak of that which changes in its outward appearance as the butterfly goes through the metamorphosis of going from a worm into a beautiful flying creature. And what is meant by our describing Satan as metamorphic is his capacity, that we say in theology, to manifest himself subspecies boni, which means, literally, under the auspices of the good.

So far from being this ludicrous character in the red suit and the horns and the pitchfork that we talked about in the last discussion, he rather has the capacity to manifest himself, the Scripture says, as an angel of light. He doesn't come against us bearing fangs with a hideous visage, but rather he will approach us disguised in beauty, looking attractive. That's part of the allure of his seductive techniques.

I think if Satan were to manifest himself in a human person, it would not be some horrible, famous, miserably wicked person like a Saddam Hussein or Osama Bin Laden, but rather he will come on the stage of history looking like a Billy Graham. That's no reflection on Billy Graham. I'm just saying he will try to appear as someone laudable, someone who manifests such some kind of righteousness, but he does it in a hypocritical manner because he is a liar.

Now he's called in Scripture the prince of darkness, the prince of the power of the air, the one who is the prince of this world. That is his domain. And his two main functions that he gives to the world are the functions of temptation and accusation.

And it's very important for us to understand both of those functions of Satan. The one with which we're most familiar is his function as the tempter. We've already seen how in paradise he seduced Adam and Eve by tempting them to sin.

We know that his full powers and expertise were unleashed against Jesus in his hellish experience of temptation in the Judean wilderness. Again, I shudder to think of what our Lord went through in that 40-day experience. As I've said before, the difference between the environment in which Jesus was subjected to the power of Satan compared with that of Adam and Eve are overwhelming.

Adam and Eve were tempted in the midst of paradise, in the midst of a luscious garden where fruit and food was available at every point. Jesus is subjected to the assault of Satan in the midst of the Judean wilderness, and if you've ever been to Palestine, if you've ever been to Israel and have gone by the Judean wilderness, it's one of the most desolate places you ever see in your life. The only living things in there are a few birds, a couple of rabbits, and scorpions, and some snakes.

It's a horrible place. And yet there was Jesus for 40 days in this place of desolation, subjected to the unbridled attack of the adversary of Satan. And the attack comes to Adam and Eve on a full stomach.

It comes to Jesus after 40 days of fasting, when He has the natural biological pangs of hunger. Also the assault comes against Adam and Eve while they have the mutual strength of human companionship and fellowship. Soren Kierkegaard said, there's no more devastating condition for a human being to be subjected to for any period of time than that of solitude.

If we're going to increase our penalties against prisoners behind bars, we put them into solitary confinement. And here is Jesus utterly alone during His period of 40 days when the temptation comes. You think, for example, of His own parable of the prodigal son, whose behavior level is one thing when he's in the father's house and with the family, and he doesn't manifest his radical degeneration until he goes into a far country where he's anonymous, where nobody knows him, where there's no expectation of a certain level of behavior.

And so our Lord is subjected to this anonymity there in the desert, and Satan tries to exploit it, you know, just kneel down to me, genuflect once, nobody's going to know, nobody's going to see it, and all the kingdoms of the world will be yours. And so this is His forte, to come to the people of God and try to seduce them to sin. You know, sin itself has so much attraction to us.

If we know anything about the things of God, we know that sin can never possibly make anybody happy. And yet we're driven to seek our own happiness. Jonathan Edwards once said that the action of a will, the action of volition is the mind chooses what seems to be good for us at the moment.

So that when we choose to do things, we choose to do it not because we think it has any moral righteousness to it, but we think that it'll be good for us. And see, we get confused between happiness and pleasure. Sin brings pleasure, but never happiness.

We haven't learned that yet. We won't learn it until we find that our only happiness is in God and in the things of God when we enter into the heavenly state. In the meantime, we're subject to these seductive advances by Satan who makes sin look good to us with the promise of pleasure.

We see how Satan tries to seduce Jesus. He is successful with Adam and Eve. He goes after Peter.

He goes after all of the people of God in the pages of Scripture. And we're told that God never ever tempts us. This is a great difference between Satan and God.

And yet we read frequently in the Scripture that God will put us in the place of testing. He tests Abraham. It is the Holy Spirit that drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested by Satan.

And yet we're told by James, let no one say when he's tempted that he's tempted of God. And in that sense, what we mean is that God never entices or tries to encourage us to sin, but he may put us in a place of testing. And here's where the story of Job in the Old Testament is so instructive for us.

Let's look at that for a moment, where we read in the very first chapter of this book this description of Job. The first verse, there was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. And that man was blameless and upright and one who feared God and shunned evil.

I mean, what a tremendous description of integrity we have of Job in this introduction. Seven sons, three daughters were born to him as possessions, seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, which made him the richest man in the world. His sons would go and feast in their houses each on his appointed day and would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.

Family was wonderful. So it was when the days of feasting had run their course that Job would send and sanctify them. He would rise early in the morning to do what? To worship God, to offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all.

For Job said, it may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their heart. Thus Job did regularly. He was the model, the paradigm of virtue as a father in Scripture.

And then what happens? What is it that causes Job's world to cave in, disintegrate? In verse 6, there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came with them. And the Lord said to Satan, where do you come from? And Satan answered the Lord and said, from going to and fro on the earth, from walking back and forth on it. And the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job? There's none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil.

And so Satan answered the Lord and said, does Job fear God for naught or for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household, around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. This is the challenge that Satan brings to God, who's already now accusing Job of hypocrisy.

He's saying, I've been all over the earth, and everybody down there is in my pocket. I'm the prince of this world. They're all following me.

God said, what about Job? Have you seen my servant Job, who's upright, blameless? Ha! Satan says, of course. You're not going to look a gift horse in the mouth. You've put a hedge around him.

You've given him more money than anybody else in the world. Does Job serve you for nothing? Of course not. But let me at him.

Let me at him, and I'll show you that Job is a fair-weather follower. And when I'm finished with him, he'll curse you to your face. This is the challenge that Satan gives to God.

And so God said, okay, have at him. I'll take the hedge away, and we'll see what happens. And we have this most incredible story in the Old Testament of persistent human misery wrought by Satan upon the life, upon the family, upon the possessions of this godly man.

First of all, that should teach us something about the activity of Satan. Satan can introduce great harm to our lives, bodily afflictions, loss of possessions, all kinds of misery. But here's where we're most tempted to separate Satan from God and blame all of our calamities, all of our misfortunes on Satan as if he had a power all of his own to wreak havoc in our lives.

And so Satan can't move a finger without the divine permission. But everything that Satan does is always under the sovereign authority of God. Satan can't move a finger without the divine permission.

Now, Jesus understands that, and he understands the situation in which Job is placed. He understood the situation Adam and Eve faced when they were in the garden, and certainly he never forgot the situation he had in the isolation of the Judean wilderness. So that when he taught his disciples to pray, he says, when you pray, pray like this, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

Now, two things about that portion of the Lord's Prayer I want to mention. The first is that it's stated in a grammatical form called parallelism, where the second line really means the same thing, only in different words from the first line. And the second is, for the life of me, I don't understand why English Bibles have translated for years and centuries that phrase, deliver us from evil, because when evil is spoken of in the abstract, it is used in the neuter rather than the masculine gender.

And the word here in the Lord's Prayer in the Greek is the word paneros, which more accurately would be translated like this, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Paneros is a title for Satan. So what's Jesus saying? That we should pray that God would put a hedge around us, and keep that hedge around us, and not put us into the place where we are exposed to this assault of Satan.

And that should be our prayer, knowing that we are vulnerable all the time to the enemy, and so we say, God, protect us. Be our citadel. Be our mighty fortress.

Protect us from the attacks of Satan. That's what Jesus told us to pray about, because we see what happens with Job. The hedge comes down, and literally all hell breaks loose in his life.

So much so, that his suffering is so severe and so intense, that his best friends, who previously assumed that he was a man of great integrity, now come to him while he's sitting on the dung heap with his sores and all of that, saying to them, boy, Job, you must have done something really bad to be in this kind of condition, because you're the most miserable man in the world. You must have the most miserable record of sin in all the world for this to happen. And then his closest companion, his wife, can't stand to see her husband suffering, and she says, give it up, Job.

Curse God, and die. The only relief you're ever going to get is if you will curse God. I mean, this is just like the disciples of Jesus, his closest friends.

Don't go to Jerusalem. Whatever you do, don't be obedient to God. It'll cost too much.

And here's his own wife, while he's sitting there saying, though he slay me, yet will I trust him, yet will I serve him, she's saying, stop that. You can't take anymore. Curse him, and die.

But he doesn't. And Satan is defeated. And in this, God is glorified, and Job himself is vindicated, as all that he has lost is restored abundantly.

What a fantastic story in the Old Testament about the power of Satan and about the vindication of God's people by the Lord. Now, again, Satan comes two ways to destroy Job. First of all, he tries to tempt him to repudiate God.

And the power of the temptation is in the pain that he brings. But not only that, he comes in his favorite mode of activity for the believer. Another title for Satan in the Bible is Diabolos, which means accuser.

And Satan is seen as the accuser of the brethren. And the accusation he brings against Job is that the only reason that Job is serving God at all is for the prosperity that God has given. And that's not true.

It's a false charge. It's a false accusation. Now, we all are familiar with the way in which Satan tempts us.

But his greater work for the Christian is to accuse the Christian, to have his finger in your face about your guilt, to take you away from the cross, away from the gospel, and point out how bad you are. And the thing that's so terrible about Satan functioning as a prosecuting attorney is that he doesn't have to make up charges that are false. He can point out the reality of our sins and try to take away our joy, try to take away our peace, try to take away our trust in the gospel.

And it's one of the difficult things in the Christian life is the discern between the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting us of sin and the work of Satan in accusing us of sin, because they may both be pointing at the same transgression. But I've noticed this difference. When the Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, as painful as it may be for a moment, there's always something sweet in it, because in conviction the Spirit always gives us the promise of forgiveness and restoration, whereas Satan, when he accuses us, the purpose and the goal of his accusation is to destroy us, to paralyze us, to cause us to abandon all hope.

That's why Paul, when he talks about election, when Paul talks about the grace of God that is so abundant and so magnificent, he raises a defiant charge against Satan, who shall lay any charge against God's elect. That's why when Satan comes with his accusations, we have to say, sticks and stones, Satan, get out of here. We know we're guilty, but we have Christ, we have the gospel, and that is our shield against your accusations.

That's why I love it in the Heidelberg Catechism, the statement that Christ is our only hope in life and death. That's why I have to cling to him, cling to the gospel, because Satan is going to accuse us every minute. Finally, we read in the Scriptures that Satan has a whole army of assistants, the daimonia, the demons, and we see that their activity is heavily concentrated during Jesus' tenure on this earth.

In fact, the very first beings to recognize the full identity of Jesus were the demons. They called him the Holy One of Israel, the Son of God. Why do you come and torment us before our time? They understood.

They knew that their days were limited. They knew that there was a time when they would be finished. But they also knew that the time wasn't yet, and they're trying to negotiate with Jesus.

Jesus still released them from inhabiting the man that they were tormenting, drove them into the pigs, and sent them to their own destruction. People say, why didn't he send them to hell, because the time wasn't here yet, but he dealt with them. And these demons are all over the place.

In the Bible we see them possessing people and oppressing people, causing bodily harm, property damage, and all kinds of wild things, and the Christian is always faced with this question, can I be demon possessed? I don't believe so. I believe that people can be demon possessed, but I don't think a Christian can be demon possessed, not a true Christian, not a regenerate person, because in that regenerate person resides God the Holy Spirit, and the Scriptures tell us where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. So no demon can hold us hostage to the power of Satan.

They can oppress us, they can harass us, they can tempt us, attack us, do all of those things, but thanks be to God, he who is in us is greater than he who is in the world.