

Nefarious Otherworldly Forces

On Sunday we continued our sermon series on “Jesus, Light of the World,” by exploring Jesus’ teachings about Satan and demons.

1. Warm-up question: Jeff told a fake story about Pastor Vivian being tempted by the devil to purchase an expensive dress. What kind of extravagant purchases are you most apt to be tempted to make?
 2. When you hear the word “Satan,” what thoughts, feelings, or words come to mind?
 3. Several years ago someone said to Jeff, “You have a good education. So how can someone with your education believe in Satan and demons?” On Sunday Jeff explained how he thinks this through, in the following steps:
 - ✓ Here on earth we see that God has created many different levels of being ranging from simple one-cell amoebas up to complex humans.
 - ✓ If God created multiple levels of life forms beneath us humans, it’s plausible that God would also create levels of being above us. Why would we think God’s creative process stopped with humans?
 - ✓ Human experience is filled with stories of encounters with these higher-level beings. We often call them “angels.”
 - ✓ So both experience and God’s pattern in creation make angels seem likely.
 - ✓ Moreover, if God gives angels the freedom to make choices that have real consequences, it seems likely some of them would make bad choices and go off the deep end, just like some humans do, resulting in what we would call “demons,” i.e., bad angels.
 - ✓ Why wouldn’t God destroy these bad angels? For the same reason God doesn’t destroy humans who go bad. God’s love never gives up on us.
 - ✓ Ergo: It’s not illogical to believe that Satan and demons exist and in some complex, mystical way impact us at our level of being.
- a. Critique the foregoing line of thought. Does it make sense to you? Why or why not?
 - b. Not all Christians agree. Some believe Satan and demons are literal higher-level beings. Others believe Satan and demons are the Bible’s symbolic way of talking about evil and helping us humans, in a relatable way, to understand the complexity of how abstract evil works in the world. How do you see it?
 - c. Jeff shared a story about Anna Lescheid’s encounter with a good angel (a light that covered her during a dangerous hike in a storm) and about an encounter with an evil spirit (when a congregant was warned that a ‘Spirit of Conflict’ was attacking our church). What do you make of stories like this? Have you ever had an experience with good or bad angels?

4. There are at least 23 different instances where Jesus' teachings refer to Satan and demons. At the outset of his ministry, Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness. Throughout his ministry, Jesus cast demons out of people. On the cross, Satan made one last attempt to destroy Jesus. Several examples of Jesus' teachings about Satan and demons, and one example from the Apostle Paul, are printed on p. 3. Read each example and discuss the question stated there.

5. Regardless whether you understand Jesus' teachings about Satan and demons to be literal or symbolic, both viewpoints lead to the same practical bottom-line conclusion: Evil is best understood as something that is active, intelligent, and strategic, rather than abstract, directionless, and inert. The implications for our personal lives are illustrated by the story of Peter in the Gospels. Here's how the story goes:
 - ✓ When Jesus says he must go to Jerusalem and be killed, Peter vigorously disagrees. He tries to dissuade Jesus (Matthew 16:21-23).
 - ✓ Jesus insists on going anyway. Right before his arrest, he warns Peter that Satan is out to get him. Read Luke 22:31-34.
 - ✓ After Jesus' arrest, Peter gets so upset and disappointed with Jesus, three times he denies ever knowing him. Then he "weeps bitterly" (Luke 22:54-62).
 - ✓ After the resurrection, Jesus seeks out Peter and reinstates him as leader of the disciples (John 21:9-19). Although Peter failed, he is not destroyed.
 - a. Jesus warned Peter, "Satan desires to have you all to sift you like wheat." That's Satan's basic strategy for all of us. What does it mean to be "sifted like wheat"?
 - b. Jeff noted that Jesus' prayers didn't keep Peter from failing, but they did keep him from giving up after he failed. Satan's ultimate goal is not to get us to fail, but to get us to give up when we fail. When in your life has Satan come closest to breaking you?
 - c. There's a war for your soul. To prepare for that war, Paul urges us to "put on the whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6:13), which means we should steep ourselves in things of the Spirit to prepare ourselves to battle Satan. What kinds of things are you doing to armor-up your soul?
 - d. Jeff said, "Every problem has both a human and spiritual dimension. Tackling our problems on the human level, without recognizing the spiritual dimension, is like taking a knife to a gun fight." Tell us about a practical problem you're facing right now? What might it look like to address both the human and spiritual dimension of that problem?

Examples Of How Jesus Talked About Satan

Luke 10:17

“The seventy [disciples] returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!’ Jesus said, ‘I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority . . . over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you.’”

- ✓ What might it mean to say we’ve been given “authority over the demons”?
- ✓ What did Jesus mean when he said, “I saw Satan fall from heaven?” Was he speaking literally or figuratively?

Luke 11:15

“Some said, ‘Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of demons. . . .’ Jesus replied . . . , ‘If Satan is divided against Satan, how shall his kingdom stand . . . ? But if by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.’”

- ✓ Not the reference to “Satan’s kingdom.” What does that mean? What does Satan’s kingdom look like?

John 8:44

“Jesus said, ‘You are of your father the devil and you choose to do your father’s desires. . . . When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.’”

- ✓ What insight should we gain from this verse about how Satan operates?
- ✓ When in your life have you been in the grips of a Satanic lie?

Example Of How Paul Talked About Satan

Ephesians 6:12

“Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in otherworldly places.”

- ✓ How does this verse make you feel? Do you believe it? If so, what are the implications for us in our daily lives?