

Satan defeated at the cross. Spanish Wells Gospel. 24 May 2009.

My subject for this evening is 'Satan defeated at the cross'.

And our reading consists of just one verse from the New Testament – from Hebrews 2, verse 14.

The devil's connection with the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ went back a very long way. It began, of course, right back in the garden of Eden – when, in Genesis 3. 15, the Lord God notified the serpent, 'I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between *your seed* and *her Seed*' – when the Lord God served the tempter clear notice that, '*He* (the Seed of the woman, that is) shall bruise (shall 'crush') *your head*, and *you* shall bruise (shall crush) *His heel*'. And I note that God's declaration did *not* – as is often said – take the form of a *promise* to Adam or to Eve, but that of a *curse* and judgement pronounced on the serpent.² And with those words the battle lines were drawn.

For, understandably, from that moment on, the devil's strategy was, at all costs, to frustrate God's programme and thereby prevent his own defeat. And this he attempted to do by launching a series of pre-emptive strikes against 'the seed of the woman'.

Although, inevitably, much was unclear to Satan then, this at least was certain, that, at some time One was to come who, though suffering injury at his, the devil's hand – this injury being spoken of figuratively as the crushing of His heel – this One would succeed in defeating and, effectively, in destroying him (the devil) – for this was clearly implied by the reference to the crushing of the serpent's head.

And the obvious way for the devil to avoid this most unwelcome outcome was, of course, for him, one way or another, to destroy the awaited Seed before that Seed could destroy him.

The Bible doesn't actually identify Satan's attempts in this direction – indeed, we read very little of the devil in the Old Testament – but it is not difficult – without, I trust, being too fanciful – for us to spot at least some of these.

And, keeping pace with God's gradual revelation of the ancestry of the Seed – the Seed of the woman ... the Seed of Abraham ... a descendant of Jacob ... from the royal tribe of Judah ... and, finally, of the Seed of David, we might think, for example :

(i) of Cain's murder of Abel;

(ii) of the corruption which led to the world-wide flood and to the near extinction of the human race;

(iii) the planned slaughter of all the Jewish *male* (note that word!) children in Egypt. Remember God's word to the serpent in the garden, '*he* shall bruise/crush your head';

(iv) the attempt by Queen Athaliah of Judah to slay all the seed of David – through whom God had earlier revealed that One would come whose throne and kingdom would be established for ever; and

(v) the cunning plan of Haman the Agagite to exterminate the entire Jewish nation in the days of Esther. At this point there was no king on the throne of Israel – no evident Seed of David – and Satan, having likely lost track of the line through which the Seed of the woman was to come, had no choice therefore but to adopt a 'blunderbuss' approach.

Yet, as you would expect, in each and every case, the serpent's endeavour was doomed to failure – frustrated by the sovereign Lord Himself.

For, if Cain murdered Abel, God responded with a Seth.

And, if the wickedness of man was great in the earth, causing the Lord to announce that He would destroy man, God responded with a Noah.

And, if Pharaoh planned the slaughter of all the Jewish male children in Egypt, God responded by using the two chief Hebrew midwives, and by sheltering baby Moses in the most remarkable way.

And, if Queen Athaliah of Judah attempted to wipe out the entire seed of David, God responded by using Jehosheba, the late King Ahaziah's sister, who saved the life of one of Ahaziah's sons, Joash.

And, if Haman the Agagite planned to exterminate the entire Jewish race, God responded through the faith and courage of young Queen Esther.

Yes - in each and every case, the serpent's best endeavour failed - thwarted by the living God.

But all came to a head, of course, when our Lord Jesus Himself entered the world.

And, during our Lord's life on earth, the devil employed *two* very different tactics to meet, and if possible to deal with, the threat posed by the awaited Seed.

On the one hand, during our Saviour's public ministry, the devil attempted to win Him over – to persuade our Lord to change sides – and to join his (the devil's) ranks. As some of us saw yesterday morning, in the wilderness of Judea, Satan offered Him all the kingdoms of the world ... destined to be given to Him by God – although only in God's time, and, as we know, only following the suffering of the cross ... Satan offered our Lord all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for His worship – together with, as our Lord observed, His service! In effect, it was the devil's same proposal which lay behind Simon Peter's outburst at Caesarea Philippi, when he objected violently to any suggestion that the Messiah should suffer and die at Jerusalem, Matt. 16. 21-23.³

But, generally speaking, the devil concentrated his efforts on attempting to *destroy* the Seed.

The opening of Revelation 12 speaks of the 'great red dragon' – whose identity is made very clear, 'the ancient serpent, called devil and Satan', v. 9 – who 'stood before the woman who was ready to give birth (Israel, as I understand the imagery), to devour her child (who was, we are told there, to rule all nations with a rod of iron) as soon as it was born', Rev. 12. 3-5. And it therefore comes as no surprise that when, after 400 years of silence following the close of the Old Testament, God spoke again, Satan's ears pricked up – and alerted by (i) the announcements of the angel Gabriel, (ii) by the rejoicing of the angelic host, and (iii) by the visit of the wise men from the East, the enemy attempted – through the insane jealousy of Herod the Great – to kill the young child – and I note with interest the word the angel of the Lord used when he spoke to Joseph in a dream, 'Herod will seek the young child to *destroy* Him', Matt. 2. 13. There can be no doubt who stood behind that attempt!

In John 8, which ends with the Jews taking up stones to cast at Jesus, our Lord twice told them, 'You seek to kill me', John 8. 37, 40, adding, 'You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning', v. 44 – as our Lord pulled back the curtain on their murderous designs.

And can we not detect the same sinister – albeit unseen – hand behind the later attempt to stone our Lord towards the end of John 10, and behind the earlier attempt of the men of Nazareth to cast our Lord headlong down the nearby cliff in Luke chapter 4 – where we read that 'all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath⁴, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might *throw Him down*', Luke 4. 28-29? A case perhaps of, 'Well, if you won't "throw yourself down", as I suggested on the wing of the Temple, let me help you'.⁵ And we remember that Luke had climaxed his account of the temptations with the devil's proposal that our Lord cast Himself down.

But, again, the serpent's every effort failed – whether to persuade our Lord to change sides or to destroy Him.

Until ... finally ... the dragon saw – and grasped – his opportunity. Luke records, at the opening of chapter 22 of his gospel, that 'the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might *destroy* Him (the Lord Jesus) ... *Then Satan entered Judas* ... and he went his way and conferred with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray Him to them', Luke 22. 3. This was, in fact, the first of two stages at which, we are told, the devil 'entered' into Judas – the second being in the upper room, after our Lord had dipped the morsel of bread and given it to him, John 13. 27 – following which Judas immediately left the room to bring the band of soldiers and others to arrest Jesus ... these two being the only recorded instances of which I know where the devil actually 'entered' into a man.⁶

Not that this was the only contribution made by Satan to our Lord's crucifixion – not by a long way.

We hear our Lord's ominous words in the Garden of Gethsemane, addressed to those who came to arrest Him – thanks to the guiding hand of the man into whom Satan had entered, 'When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not attempt to take me. But this is your hour, and *the power of darkness*', Luke 22. 53. I gather from this that Jesus detected the hosts of evil mustering for their final assault – with their every banner unfurled!⁷

And it is surely not difficult to believe that it was the serpent-dragon himself (a) who incited the envy and hatred of the Jewish religious leaders, (b) who incited the demand of the multitude, 'Crucify, crucify', and (c) who incited the taunts and jeers of those who stood around our Lord's cross.

No ... admittedly, we do not read of the devil at the cross – nor at Joseph's tomb, for that matter. But surely we can take it for granted that the mighty Overlord of Evil was elated – jubilant – positively ecstatic. Having been frustrated and foiled time after time at long last he had succeeded! The long-awaited Seed of the woman was dead ... was unquestionably dead! The soldier's spear had proved that!⁸

There was nothing now to fear. He, the serpent-dragon had triumphed – he had succeeded in ‘destroying’ the Seed of the woman!⁹ ‘Crush my head indeed!’

I have no doubt that Satan positively gleamed with pleasure. And I imagine the demonic host raising one mighty cheer – and performing a wild victory dance around the garden in which Joseph of Arimathea’s new – and *now occupied* – tomb was situated.¹⁰ It was all over!

Or was it? Ah, but little did they know! Little did they know that, in our Lord’s death – in that very cross – lay their ultimate defeat! Little did they know that what they believed to be their *finest* hour was, in a very real sense, their *final* hour!

Little did they know that it was not only the Lord Jesus who had been ‘cast out’¹¹ and ‘judged’¹² – cast out and judged by His own nation – but, in reality, it had been their satanic Majesty himself – ‘the ruler of this world’ – who had, as our Lord foretold, been ‘cast out’, John 12. 31¹³, and who had been ‘judged’, John 16. 11¹⁴. For the verdict is in! ‘The ruler of this world’ stands judged – stands condemned – awaiting only, in God’s time, the execution of his sentence.

Little did they know that, as we read, ‘through death He (our Lord Jesus) ‘destroyed’ (rendered powerless and ineffective, put out of commission) him who had the power (literally, the might, the force) of death, that is, the devil’, Heb. 2. 14¹⁵ – that, just as young David slew the Philistine champion with *his own* sword, so it was that, ‘*through death*’, our Saviour vanquished him who had *the power of death*, wresting from his hands his most terrifying weapon.¹⁶

Little did they know that, according to Colossians 2. 15, He then ‘disarmed (the evil) principalities and authorities, making a public spectacle of them (‘exposing them to open ridicule’),¹⁷ triumphing over them in it (in – or by – the cross, that is)¹⁸ – that the cross, which they heralded as the symbol of their victory, was in fact our Lord’s triumphal chariot!

Little did they know. But they were shortly to find out! – when, early the first day of the week, Joseph’s tomb was found empty. Its one-time Tenant had vacated the premises – He had risen – gloriously triumphant!

And so today, we view the cross of Jesus, not as the place of His defeat, but as the place of His decisive and spectacular victory, where the devil’s doom was settled – where the devil met his Waterloo – where the despot of death received what was, in one sense, *his* death-blow – at the hand of ‘the Great Dragon Slayer’.

And, ironically, Satan had done much to seal his own doom. For it was as a result of crushing the heel of the woman’s Seed that his own head would be crushed.¹⁹ Ironically, the devil’s master-plan of seeking to *destroy* the Saviour of the world, and of thereby thwarting God’s purpose, backfired on him and played an all-important role in bringing about that which he was most determined to prevent – his own *destruction!*²⁰ And the cross – the instrument of shame and death by which he thought to have achieved his greatest *victory* – became the instrument of his own *defeat.*²¹

We can rest assured that, if the devil and his forces had known what God in His wisdom was doing at the cross, then – along with the religious and political ‘rulers of this age’ – ‘they would not’, in the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 2. 8, have ‘crucified the Lord of glory’!

I said that, at the cross of Jesus, Satan ‘met his Waterloo’. And so he did. The battle of Waterloo was fought between the British under the Duke of Wellington and the French under Napoleon in 1815.²² I have read²³ – but cannot vouch for the historical basis of the story – that a series of stations, each one in sight of the next, had been set up all the way to the coast by the British to send visible coded messages from the battlefield in Belgium to be relayed across the Channel to England. And eventually, the awaited message arrived : ‘Wellington defeated ...’.

Those who first received the message were devastated – heartbroken at the news. Their commander and his army had apparently been defeated. But, actually, only part of the message had been received. For, as the message was being spelled out at one of the stations, a sudden blanket of fog obscured the signal. And when the fog cleared, the full message was sent – which read, ‘Wellington defeated Napoleon at Waterloo’. The outcome of the battle had been the exact opposite to that which the people had originally thought. Wellington had *not* lost the battle – he had *won* the battle.²⁴

But whether this story is true or not, about 3 o’clock in the afternoon of that first Good Friday the message from the cross of Jesus *seemed* to say, ‘Jesus defeated ...’. If ever a cause seemed lost – this was it. If ever the powers of darkness seemed victorious, it was then. It wasn’t until early on Easter Sunday that ‘the fog lifted’ – so to speak – and the full message was received, ‘Jesus defeated Satan at Golgotha’!

And the big issue which faces each one of this evening is simply ... whose side are we on? With whom are we going to spend eternity?

Endnotes

¹ Singular. Not, that is, the 'seed of the woman' viewed collectively.

² It was a judgment upon Satan, though it was there for Adam to lay hold of. There was no promise to fallen Adam.

³ Peter was 'not thinking the things of God, but the things of men', Matt. 16. 23 – he shared the popular view and expectation of what Messiahship involved – namely, that the Messiah would be a political and military figure. Peter saw no place in the programme for a suffering Messiah. This was, of course, the issue in the wilderness in Matthew 4. And the devil's alternative proposal then required that Jesus 'worship' him. The Lord detected that same 'hiss' at Caesarea Philippi; He could read the devil's 'small print'! Our Lord knew that it wasn't an option for Him, the incarnate Son, to simply 'take' the kingdoms and make them His. He must be given them – either by God, Psa. 2. 8, or by the great Usurper, Luke 4. 6-7.

⁴ The men in the synagogue had 'marvelled at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth' – *until* He spoke of that grace spilling over to the Gentiles – of Sidon and Syria!

⁵ Luke 4. 9, 29. (Although a different Greek word.) And we remember that Luke had climaxed his account of the temptations with the devil's proposal that our Lord cast Himself down.

⁶ As opposed to his putting something into someone's heart, John 13. 2 with Acts 5. 3, or to unclean spirits taking up their abode in someone, e.g. Mark 1. 23; 5. 2-10. Nor is there any analogy for the statement that 'Satan entered into' Judas in later Judaism; see TDNT, volume VII, pages 162-163 (article σατανᾶς).

⁷ There is evidence that the demons had given up hope that they could ever win the war, for some said to the Lord Jesus, 'What have we to do with you, Jesus, you Son of God? Have you come here to torment us *before the time?*', Matt. 8. 29. That is, they appear to have recognized the inevitability of their defeat. But this is not to say that the devil necessarily shared their bleak view of future prospects. His one consuming purpose ever seemed (and still seems) to be to defy and thwart the only true God.

⁸ John 19. 34. Although, in the event, Satan was denied the satisfaction of being able to say that he – through his human agents – had actually taken the life of the Seed of the woman. See John 10. 17-18; 19. 30-33.

⁹ In one sense, the issue had been 'who would destroy who' – for 'the Son of God was manifested, that He might *destroy* the works of the devil', 1 John 3. 8.

¹⁰ No doubt they were encouraged and excited by the sight of the soldiers, stone and seal which men had placed there. See too the demonic jubilation over Aslan's death in 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'.

¹¹ Matt. 21. 39.

¹² 'Condemned', Acts 13. 27.

¹³ The various divine judgements upon Satan, by means of which he has been – or is to be – successively 'cast down' or 'cast out' are as follows :

(i) from his original exalted station, Isa. 14. 12-15; Ezek. 28. 12-17; Luke 10. 18;

(ii) when his power was broken at the cross, Heb. 2. 14 – assuring his ultimate fate;

(iii) at the time of the Great Tribulation, Rev. 12. 7-9;

(iv) when cast into the Abyss, Rev. 20. 1-3; and

(v) finally, when cast eternally into the lake of fire, Rev. 20. 10.

¹⁴ The verdict is in! Satan stands condemned and awaits the execution of his sentence. It is only a matter of time.

¹⁵ Our Lord entered the devil's own domain and territory – namely, death – and defeated him there. 'He hath conquered Satan in the very place where he exercised his sad dominion over men, and where the judgment of God lay heavily upon men', J. N. Darby. Similar in some respects to young David slaying the Philistine champion with Goliath's own sword. (Death was the devil's province – for, at the very least, he was the one responsible for its presence in God's creation.) The death of our Lord seemed the masterpiece of Satan; but it became the cause of his most humiliating overthrow.

¹⁶ Death, originally announced (Genesis 2. 17) as the penalty of transgression, is regarded in the New Testament (notably by Paul) as the sign of the continual dominion of sin over the human race. Thus in Romans 5. 12, 15 the mere fact that all men 'from Adam to Moses' had died is adduced as sufficient proof that all were under condemnation as sinners. The devil, through whom it was that sin first entered, and death through sin, is revealed to us generally as the representative of evil, and, as such, the primeval manslayer, John 8. 44, with power given him over death, the penalty of sin, as long as man remains in his dominion, unredeemed. Till redemption cast a new light upon the gloom of death, man was all his life long in fear of it; its shadow was upon him from his birth. The one having power and dominion over death. Consider the words of J A Fowler, 'How is it that the devil is "rendered powerless" by Jesus' death? Satan seems to be "alive and well on planet earth," continuing to empower death in its many forms. The evil one was not eliminated, annihilated or obliterated at the time of the crucifixion, but the victory has been won by Christ and the "finished

work" is being worked out. Satan's "power of death" in man has been annulled and incapacitated by Jesus taking the death of mankind. The devil's derived legal right to enact death in man has been disenfranchised. The evil one has no right to empower spiritual death and behavioral death in those who have received Christ's life, made available by His death that satisfied the just consequences of death for sin. Christians have been delivered "from

the dominion of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18), and the Spirit of Christ has been franchised to exercise His power (cf. Eph. 1:19; Col. 1:11) of life and righteousness in our lives as Lord. Though our physical bodies are still mortal, that remnant of the devil’s “power of death” will be removed when we receive a “spiritual body” (I Cor. 15:44), an “imperishable body” (I Cor. 15:42), and “the last enemy that will be abolished is death” (I Cor. 15:26) when Satan and his death power are thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14)’, <http://www.christinyou.net/pdfs/PbHebrews.pdf> - on Heb. 2. 14.

¹⁷ Humiliating them.

¹⁸ The word picture seems to be that of a conquering general whose triumphal chariot leads his defeated foes during the parade of victory.

¹⁹ Was his head crushed *by our Lord* at the cross – but, in some sense, leaving him still to be crushed *under our feet* in a coming day, Rom. 16. 20? Or will his head be crushed only in a coming day? See the NET Bible on Gen. 3. 15 – possibly ‘synchronic action’.

²⁰ ‘Whilst they thought they were destroying Him, God was in and by Him destroying them and their power’, John Owen on Heb. 2. 14-15.

²¹ Satan’s apparent victory was in reality his death-knell. And he found out too late that he had sawn off the branch on which he was sitting. Jesus’ crucifixion was the purposed and intentional attempt by the archenemy of God to defeat God’s sovereign purposes in history. The resurrection is the power of God to take the devices and strategies by which His Enemy has sought to destroy His purposes and to use those very strategies to *accomplish* His purposes.

(See <http://www.mckenziestudycenter.org/theology/articles/satan.html>.)

²² 18 June 1815. It too was a decisive battle in that it finally shattered the power of Napoleon.

²³ E.g. The Speaker’s Quote Book, Roy Zuck;

<http://www.livingstonefellowship.co.za/downloads/tracts/ChristRisenIndeed.pdf>;

<http://www.dayspringradio.com/index.shtml?/subpages/009.html>;

<http://ministriesworldwide.net/articles-stories/3369-when-the-fog-lifted>.

²⁴ It seems that the story is apocryphal ... see <http://message.snopes.com/showthread.php?t=50362> . But whether this story is true or not, about 3 o’clock in the afternoon of that first Good Friday, it did look as though Jesus had been defeated ... but it was His victory! After he was defeated at Waterloo, Napoleon was exiled on the Island of Saint Helena. It is said that Napoleon once took a map and pointing to the British Isles remarked: ‘If it were not for that red spot, I would have conquered the world’. Satan could certainly say that of the cross!