

THE DEVIL'S
DESTRUCTION

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The Back to God Hour

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The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. I John 3:8

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When the lady told me about the glass exploded on the restaurant table, her eyes widened and her look of distress changed to panic.

Her contact with the spirit world had begun innocently enough some six years before with a couple of visits to a reader who had told her for a tune and showed her how she could get rid of a physical ailment. In obedience to the reader, the woman had kept small objects in a vial of water for seven days, after which she had poured out the water in her back yard. That night she heard the first thunderclap and as she staggered through her house to investigate, she found the black marks of a skeleton-like hand on one of the chairs in her living room.

Her story of levitation, voodoo, and of unsuccessful attempts to free her house of the demons that allegedly inhabited it had been a long and tedious one. Her husband sat silently next to her, occasionally nodding his head in verification of a detail. Finally the story concluded as she told how one of her close relatives supposedly in contact with the devil, had put a curse on the woman's son. The glass had shattered in the restaurant with a sound like thunder only a few weeks before she visited me as a great confirmation that the curse was real and working.

She leaned forward and she asked desperately whether there was anything I could do to protect her and her loved ones from the terrifying forces that had invaded her life.

Circumstances such as these are difficult to verify and one would be tempted to discount them or attribute them to the imagination of a disturbed

person. In this particular case, however, there was evidence that the story was not altogether imaginary, especially since the woman's husband confirmed much of what she said. But let's say that what she told me was actually the product of her imagination. Even so, one would have to ask what it was that had made her mind act in such a way. If the devil had not actually invaded their dining group and shattered the glass with a thunderclap, he had at least apparently worked some kind of powerful spell on several people's minds to make them perceive that the strange event had in fact occurred.

In any case, I felt that her question was on an appropriate one: was there any way she could develop protection against the evil forces that continually threatened her? In fact, I think that this is a question worth raising for all of us. There are evil forces. They are around us. And we all need protection.

It may be that you feel this need yourself in an especially intense way, for you may have stumbled into the scene of the woman who talked to me described. In her case as we talked, it became apparent that if the devil was dogging her footsteps, she had asked for it. She had gone this direction herself first of all, as many people do. What had happened as a rather innocent, primarily entertaining encounter with a fortune teller initially, had opened her life up to a host of influences and events that she had not counted on and couldn't handle.

Many people try to do exactly the same thing. They try to probe the mysterious future by establishing contact with a departed spirit or by consulting horoscopes or by becoming involved with a psychic. Before they know it, they discover that the quality of their lives changes. Some of them report strange occurrences and disturbances.

But more frequently those who turn to magic, sorcery, fortune telling, and other related matters discover that eventually their entire lives get tilted in another direction and every event gets coated with the strange color of magic and mystery. Maybe you are into this world, I don't know.

There is no question, so far as the Bible is concerned, that there is a devil and that the devil and those who serve him are extremely active. If you are at all familiar with the Bible, you will know that the devil is represented as God's great arch enemy who is determined to wrest creation away from God's control. And if you are personally skeptical of the possibility of people being involved with Satan and his servants in the way that the woman who spoke with me evidently believed they could be involved with them, it is still true that you need protection from Satan. For Satan does not always work in people's lives in a very dramatic way. On the contrary, Satan usually works in rather ordinary ways.

Even the New Testament, which describes the exceptionally terrifying effects of demon possession, most frequently describes Satan's work in human lives in terms that should lead us to expect that generally his mischievous dealings are expressed as if there is nothing strange about them at all. Demon possession is a very real event. It is described in the Bible primarily as something that burst upon society with special intensity when Jesus was in this world. One commentator says, "Demon-possession is a phenomenon which occurred almost exclusively, but then to be sure on an amazing scale, during Jesus' appearance on earth and to a lesser extent during the activity of the apostles." At the same time, the Bible describes those who rejected Jesus Christ who was the light of the world as people who "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" {John

3: 19). These were people who were not under the influence of the devil in the sense that they were demon possessed in an especially dramatic way. But their deeds were evil. They were in bondage to evil. And that, too, is a serious, frightening condition of life. It is possible that you are under the influence of the evil one that way yourself right now.

Judas is the great example in the Bible of a man who appeared rational, but who was in fact under the influence of the devil. John 13 repeatedly describes Judas this way. It tells how Satan entered Judas' heart and Judas went out to betray the Savior. And the Bible says, very significantly, "and it was night" (John 13:30). To be sure. It was not only night in the land, but the heart of the great betrayer was night.

So, you see, the woman who looked at me with terror and asked for protection was framing a meaningful request. People can be influenced by the devil both very dramatically and very ordinarily. Where could she find protection from the power of the evil one? Where can I find such protection? Where can you find it? Maybe you know nothing of thunder in the night, of glasses pitching marvelously from shelves, and strange signs materializing from nowhere. Fine. But don't think yourself superior to some who might be experiencing such strange events. For you may well be just as much in the grip of Satan as they are.

I invite you to examine your life for just a moment. Do you make all your decisions with no reference to God and to His Word? Do you have to admit that you never pray? Do you have to admit that your relationships with others are extremely unsatisfactory? Must you admit as well that really the only time you feel somewhat relaxed and at ease is when you are under the influence of alcohol or some other drug? If you must answer

yes to questions like these, you certainly are not very much under the influence of God, and those who resist God's influence open their lives to influences that come from elsewhere.

One thing more. Have you by any chance descended into the sub-basement of human sensual experience that nowadays is supposed to express the highest reaches of sexual liberation? Have you experimented with some of the perverse forms of sexual encounter that have become so prevalent we are told we may no longer speak of perversion when we refer to them? Well, on the basis of the Bible, it would have to be said that those who have surrendered themselves to such vile passions have opened their lives to the destructive influences of the devil.

All this should be enough to show that serious people should ask, how can I find protection from the influence of the devil? They should ask this question, too, because there is an inviting emptiness in so many lives that fosters visits from the evil influences of the realm of Satan.

In Luke 11, there is a description of the way the forces of evil tend to come and inhabit the empty places of the human personality. We read: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when he comes he finds it swept and put in order. Then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first" (vv. 24-26). These words describe a dynamic relationship between men and the world of the demons. The demons evidently have their own personalities, and they are restless, searching for places to go and people to influence. When they find an empty "house" they tell their demon friends of the op-

portunities and they enter the empty place together.

Any number of people are such "empty houses". This is because our culture has purposefully rejected many of the great Biblical positions that nurtured the human spirit in the past and helped make our life experience wholesome. Having rejected God and His Word, literally millions of people are waiting to be filled with other ideas and points of view. Their lives are empty in the sense that they have no firm faith in God any longer and their minds are a vacuum.

So we do need protection, you see. And in terms of this protection which we need desperately, it is important that we understand that the Bible describes the work of Jesus Christ, when He went to the cross as the great work of God by which the works of the devil were destroyed. In the book of I John we read this description of Jesus' coming into the world: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (3:8). And the Biblical record indicates that this is indeed the case.

The first appearance of the devil upon the human scene was concluded with a divine announcement that the day would come when Christ would destroy him. The scene was the garden of tragedy where our first parents voluntarily chose to reject the rule of God and go their own way. But God appeared and announced that the apparent victory of Satan over God's great work of creation would finally be reversed when *the seed of the woman*, a reference to Jesus Christ, would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15).

Satan appears occasionally throughout the pages of the Old Testament, and when he does, he continually tries to destroy God's people. The book of Job is the description of Satan's attempt to ruin Job's health and mutilate his spirit. But in the book

of Job, Satan's activity is carefully limited by the power of Almighty God (Job 2:6). In the book of Zechariah, Satan appears as the great accuser of the people of God, the cosmic tattletale who reminds God of their sins and encourages God to punish His people with hell. But in Zechariah, too, Satan is rebuffed and his accusations are turned aside (3:2).

When the prophecy concerning Christ that was spoken already at the time of man's fall into sin was finally fulfilled and Jesus was on His way to the cross, it seemed as if the entire demonic world rose up in unified opposition against their great enemy, Jesus.

Jesus' ministry began with a specific confrontation between Him and Satan. The Gospels record Jesus' temptation by Satan. Jesus, who was a real man whose body and spirit were weakened by prolonged fasting, was subjected to severe testing as Satan tried to make the very Son of God part of his kingdom. The grotesque ugliness of that confrontation defies our imagination—that Satan should boldly attempt to make the very Son of God bow before him is incredible! But it happened. And Jesus resisted (See Matthew 4: 1-11). Here warfare followed and the Satanic forces fell in disarray before Jesus as He advanced to the

The Gospels record Jesus' healing of many who had mental and physical diseases that were demon induced. Some thrashed about in anguished terror before Jesus released them. Some were given the power of speech again when Jesus released them from the devil's grip. A particularly striking episode was Jesus' healing of the Gadarene demoniac. Mark's Gospel records that fearsome encounter this way:

"When [Jesus] had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean

spirit, who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him any more, even with a chain, for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces, and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped him; and trying out with a loud voice, he said, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me.' For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many.' And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; and they begged him, 'Send us to the swine, let us enter them.' So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out and entered the swine, and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea (Mark 5:2-13).

Such an episode demonstrates the massive power of the demons who could inhabit a single person in such terrifying numbers, and it also demonstrates the massive power of Christ who came to destroy the works of the devil. And the power and the authority which Jesus possessed, given as well to those who followed Him at that time. On one occasion He sent out a company of 12 of His followers and gave them authority to cast out demons (Mark 6:7). On another occasion, 70 of His followers came back from a mission and the Bible describes their triumphant return this way: "The seventy returned joyfully, saying, 'Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!' 'And Jesus' reply is especially interesting for it is a

pictorial representation of His great ministry. He said, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you" (Luke 10:17-19).

As the days of Jesus' earthly ministry drew fewer, and the cross itself approached, the pace of Christ's battle quickened, and the tension mounted. The devil's attacks upon Jesus finally focused upon Judas who became the devil's henchman, Satan's hand-picked lieutenant whose task it was to arrange that Jesus would be destroyed on the cross. John 12 describes the impact of the mounting conflict within Jesus' own psychological experience. Jesus says, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing by heard it and said that it had thundered. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered 'This voice was come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself'" (27-33).

So it was that as Jesus Christ was lifted on Calvary's cross, He finally met and destroyed the power of Satan utterly. Now men from all the ends of the earth may look to Him and be delivered from the power of Satan. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. He saw the devil fall like lightning from heaven. Satan has been beaten and his power to rule this world has been broken. But this does not mean that he cannot still make our experience miserable. It does not mean that he does not try to capture human thought and ideas and corrupt and pervert them. He does all this, but he does it as a wounded animal who is twice as

ferocious because he has been wounded. The Bible calls Satan a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). The lion roars because he has been cornered and his end is certain, but before he is cast into the eternal lake of fire and brimstone, he lashes out and tries to destroy as much as he can. A

When you think of the cross of Calvary, you must remember that it was the cross where Jesus and Satan met head-on, and Jesus won. This is the meaning of the resurrection. It was not possible for death to hold Jesus in subjection, but He burst death's prison.

The day Christ died on Calvary was the day Satan was destroyed. Christ's death sealed Satan's doom. Now the power of Christ is available to you. You may turn to Christ and you may surrender yourself to Him totally, and confidently await His power of salvation from Satan's dominion.

I have talked with people who were terrified because events were happening in their lives that they felt were demon inspired. But what have they done? They have tried to destroy the black magic in their lives with white magic. They have lit candles, swung censers, and engaged in a whole host of activities which were the counterpart of the activities which got them into so much trouble. Such an approach becomes a vicious circle. What they have to do is break out of the magic circle and recognize that Jesus is the only protection we have against the power of the devil.

Jesus came to destroy the devil's works. If you want a life that is free from the devil's influence, you should turn to Jesus Christ. Put your trust in Him. Pray to Him each day. Read the Bible that tells us all we need to know about Him. Confess that without the blood shed on Calvary's cross, we are all in deep, deep trouble. Turn from your sinful ways and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Christ died on Calvary's cross, He destroyed the works of the devil. Now the only people who will be troubled by the devil in this world are those who reject Jesus. Some day the devil will be cast into hell eternally, and those who have refused Jesus' offer of help, will join him. This is horrifying and ugly. But it is true. Those who reject Jesus will join the devil in his eternal death. But those who believe in Jesus, experience relief and joy today. And they will be delivered from eternal destruction.

Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil. That's the kind of a Savior you need.

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