

Selected Scriptures: A Theology of Demons - Part 2

Read Job 1:1-22

If you remember from last week, we took a pause from 1 Samuel to talk about demons - also called evil spirits, unclean spirits, harmful spirits. We did that because right after David is anointed king of Israel, the Spirit of God leaves Saul, rests on David and then God gives Saul a harmful spirit that torments him for the rest of his life. David is actually brought in by Saul to help pacify the evil spirit and it seems to work.

So we paused to talk about demons and evil spirits. Last week was more of a survey of what they are and many of the potential ways in which they operate. This morning I want to look more at specific ways in which we as believers need to be on guard against Satan. Just because we are in Christ does not mean we get a free pass from being harassed by the devil and his angels.

I wanted us to read from Job because I think it's safe to say that Job was probably more godly than any of us here. Even God himself says there is no one else like him on the earth. And yet God commissions Satan to do his worst against Job. And he does. His family is gone, his wealth is gone, his herds and animals are all gone. Later in chapter 2 he will be struck with a skin disease we can't even imagine. **Read 2:7-8**

Just because a person is in Christ doesn't mean we are somehow insulated from demonic activity. On the contrary, we may even be the way in which God is showing demons how futile their attempts are to get us to renounce Christ.

Let me ask you: If God were to take absolutely everything you had - money, children, property, friends - and give you a skin infection where your only relief was to scrape yourself with a broken pot, put people in your life who constantly accused you of sin and a wife who nagged you constantly, would you still praise Jesus? Would you still walk in joyful obedience to Jesus?

Because that's on the table. God could do that, he wouldn't be wrong to do so. Our lives could be upended through the work of Satan and his demons under the sovereignty of God.

And yet at the same time Christ is so glorious and gracious and worthy of all of our allegiance and praise and devotion that we should be glad to be counted worthy to suffer for his sake, if that were to be his will. We're not insulated from suffering and we're not insulated from Satan just because we're in Christ. So we need to be sober-minded as we think about these things.

We're going to look again today at a fair amount of passages as we consider how we need to be on guard against the devil and his angels. One of the main themes we saw last week about demons was their affect on people in a physical way. Some were mute, some blind, some had epileptic seizures, some had what we would consider mental illnesses, one lady was bent over - we'd call it scoliosis. There were a variety of physical ways in which people were afflicted.

And I'll mention it again: just because someone has symptoms does not mean for sure there is demonic activity. We see others in the gospels with similar symptoms and Jesus simply heals them rather than removing a demon. But we would be foolish to rule out the possibility of demonic activity. And so part of our prayer for healing could include a petition to remove any demonic activity that might be happening.

Turn over to 2 Cor. 12:7-10. Here we have pretty clear evidence, in line with what we saw in Job's life, that just because someone is a believer does not mean we are insulated from demonic activity. Paul has just talked about grand visions of heaven he has seen. But to keep him from pride, God has given him affliction. **Read 7-10**

Now, to be fair to this passage, we are not 100% sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was - he doesn't tell us for sure. The ESV Study Bible lists the 4 most common possibilities that scholars suggest:

- 1) Psychological anguish over the churches he has planted

- 2) persecution for preaching the gospel
- 3) physical ailment of some kind - maybe an eye disorder
- 4) demonic harassment with something we see in the gospels

Again, we cannot be certain, but I agree with the study notes that it was probably a physical malady of some kind because “thorn in the flesh” seems to lend toward an ailment or pain.

And I want to point out two things here: First, that whatever it was was caused by a messenger from Satan. Literally, an angel (ἄγγελος) of Satan. It was demonic. Here is the apostle Paul, great missionary church planter, wrote most of the NT, who is harassed by a demon. If the apostle Paul is not impervious to demonic activity, then neither are we.

The second thing I want to point out is who is in control of the demon. Who does Paul ask to take it away? The Lord Jesus. Jesus is in sovereign control of all spiritual activity, including whatever might be afflicting his people. What’s Jesus say here, by the way? He says “no.” Why does Jesus say no? Because he wants Paul to rely on his grace. **Read 9**

So we may deal with demonic activity in a variety of forms. We might not even know if it’s demonic, but we can take comfort that Jesus is sovereign even over demons. Jesus is not evil, nor does he tempt us with evil, but he will use even evil spirits for his glory that we may rest in his sufficient grace. And it’s not always his will that they go away. We don’t need to be afraid of this, or bitter about it, but rather we rely on his grace in our weakness to see us through.

Can I tell you something? It doesn’t seem as though this is much different than if we’re just dealing with normal day to day difficulties, which is why he goes on to say this. **Read 10**

So it doesn’t really matter what our ailment is, we can rely on the strength of Christ to carry us through. What if you found out you had an incurable eye problem or a heart problem that was totally natural? What if somehow you knew for sure it was because of a messenger from Satan but the effects were the same? Nothing changes except maybe the source. The solution is all the same, isn’t it? We trust in the sufficient strength of Christ to carry us through. The more we rely on him and trust him, the more glory he gets.

2) **Look back at 2 Cor. 11.** Here Paul is talking about false teachers - false apostles - that had crept into the church and were undermining the gospel. They were pretending to be righteous, but really they were wolves. **Read 12-15**

Here’s what I want to point out: Those who are doing Satan’s work rarely have a sign over their head that says “working for Satan.” Actually they have a sign that says “working for God more than you are!” They are usually calling for some sort of righteousness that goes way above and beyond the Bible. Well, you know what it’s called when your righteousness exceeds God’s righteousness? Legalism.

Paul says in **1 Tim. 4:1-5** that there are some who preach doctrines of demons. He says those doctrines are forbidding eating certain types of food and forbidding marriage. Forbidding food means the Seventh Day Adventists are out - they say we’re still under the OC food laws. And forbidding marriage rules the Catholics out because they forbid priests from marrying. This is what demons teach.

But forbidding things sounds so holy and good. It seems extra spiritual. “God made those food laws for our benefit!” No, the food laws are gone. You’re trying to be more holy than Jesus who declared everything clean. You’re trying to be more holy than Jesus who joined Adam to Eve in the Garden in marriage. God designed marriage to have companionship, have dominion and make babies.

But false teachers and demons and Satan parade themselves as though they are more holy, as though they are angels of light. This is something we need to keep in mind when people are twisting Scripture: it’s not out of love and righteousness. It’s out of a desire to further Satan’s agenda and we need to be on guard for that.

3) Look back at **2 Cor. 2:5-11**. Let's get a little more pointed. Satan can tempt us when we refuse to forgive other believers. Here we have a situation where someone sinned in Corinth - surprise, surprise. We don't know exactly what happened, but it seems as though the man repented. **Read 5-11**

So a member in the Corinthian church had sinned. The church excommunicated him. They went through the **Matt. 18:15-20** process of confronting him one on one, then with one or two others, they told it to the church. But the man refused to repent at every step, so eventually they banned from fellowship - they excommunicated him. In other places Paul actually calls excommunication "handing someone over to Satan" (**1 Cor. 5:5, 1 Tim. 1:20**). They no longer have the spiritual fellowship of the church and are open to more direct attacks from Satan.

But here's the deal: any time someone is under church discipline, is excommunicated, the goal isn't just to kick them out. The goal is actually that they would see how dangerous their sin is so that they would repent! They would turn from their sin and rejoin the fellowship. We don't disfellowship someone just because we're done with them forever. The goal is to get them to see the gravity of their situation and repent.

But here's what was happening in Corinth: the man had repented and the Corinthians weren't letting him back in. Paul's saying: Look, I forgive him and you need to forgive him as well and let him back into fellowship. If you don't he'll be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. You'll break his spirit. That's not the gospel. You know what it is? That's a ploy Satan. **Read 11**

You know what Satan wants in a congregation? Unforgiveness. He wants bitterness and factions and grudges. He wants you to keep records of wrong. Really long, complicated Excel spreadsheet records of all the things other people have done to you.

I mean if Jesus came to earth to bring us forgiveness, and Satan is basically trying to undo everything Jesus did, what does he want? Unforgiveness. Listen, I'm serious, if you've got something against someone in our congregation, you need to get it worked out. Either you need to talk to them and work through it - maybe even go through the Matt. 18 process - or if you're not going to do that you need to let it go **forever**. That doesn't mean you're not wise in how you interact with them, but it does mean that they are free and clear in your sight.

Satan wants the offense to linger. He wants you to stew about it. He wants you to talk with other people about it. Unforgiveness is nothing new. It's one of the oldest tricks in Satan's playbook. We're not ignorant, we know exactly what he's trying to do.

4) **Look** back at **1 Cor. 7**. There's another common scheme or tactic that Satan uses. This will make us all uncomfortable for a few minutes but it is very serious. Here's Satan's tactic against believers: Married people refusing to be intimate with their spouses.

Let me sketch out the situation. In Corinth, there were basically 2 groups of people who misunderstood some commands that Paul had given. One group thought that freedom in Christ meant they could go have marital relations with anyone - even prostitutes - and that was okay. No, that's not okay.

The other group said I can't even have relations with my own wife - well, that's not okay either. These groups were in the same congregation. Paul says, "No, you're both wrong." **Read 1-4**

Now, stick with me, I'll balance this out in a minute. But we have to start with the fact that part of God's design in marriage is intimacy. When a person gets married that's part of what they're signing on to. That your body was not your own, it's your spouse's body. But the problem is that sometimes people intentionally deprive each other. **Read 5**

So a spouse who intentionally deprives their spouse are not fulfilling their vows. That's both men and women. The only time intimacy should be interrupted is when 4 things are in place.

- 1) by mutual agreement - both agree to fast from intimacy
- 2) for a limited period of time
- 3) specifically for the purpose of prayer. It's like fasting from food, but instead fasting from intimacy

4) the aim is to come back together

Why are those 4 elements so crucial? Because Satan isn't messing around. If God created marriage he's working overtime to destroy it. What's a great way to destroy marriage? Tempt husbands and wives in the area of purity and faithfulness. How do you make an already difficult marriage worse? Throw adultery into the mix.

Paul then goes on to explain he'd rather people be single, but he realizes that getting married is better than burning with passion. **Read 6-9**

So Paul is single and there's part of being single that's a great thing. You can do way more for the Kingdom if you're single than if you're married. You don't have the difficulties that come with marriage if you're single. For Paul, singleness is great. But he realizes singleness is not for everyone.

For Paul, the main reason to be married is to have a God-honoring outlet for passion. It's better to marry than burn with passion, he says. Yes it's to have kids and have companionship and all that. But his point is that it's an outlet for passion. So if you're married, part of being married is a willingness to be intimate. And if one spouse is depriving the other, that's a massive door for Satan to tempt the other spouse.

We learned this week that Jeff Bezos the CEO of Amazon got a divorce from his wife of 25 years. Very sad and tragic. But it wasn't much of a shocker that less than 24 hours later we learned that he had already been involved with another lady for some time. And this doesn't happen with just the super-rich and famous, or with unbelievers. It happens with Christians who fall into adultery as well. The person who commits adultery is to blame for adultery, but spouses can either help or hinder their spouse. So the temptation that Satan throws everyone - but especially married people - is to look for intimacy elsewhere.

There's so much more we could say here, but before I move on I feel the need to mention a couple of things to keep in mind with this specific issue. There can be reasons that make intimacy difficult.

Age can play a factor: intimacy declines as people get older. Medical conditions can hamper intimacy. If someone has a history of abuse of any kind that can play a serious role. Also, if there's no emotional connection in the marriage, there's probably not going to be much intimacy either. Men, if you're neglecting and depriving your wife emotionally and relationally, good luck.

Let's keep looking. **Turn to Jas. 4:6-10.** Here, what I want us to see is that Satan uses pride to trip us up. Yes, pride is something our own flesh can do and the world can do, but it also happens directly through Satan as well. **Read 6-7**

A few points. James says God opposes the proud and gives grace to the humble. So if you're proud, God is against you. If you're humble, God is for you and gives you grace.

But look at **Vs. 7.** How does James say we should be humble? **Read**

He makes a direct link: If you're humble you will submit yourself to God, you'll obey his commands. Proud people don't obey God. Proud people disobey God, ignore his commands, excuse their sin, justify their sin. God opposes them.

He also says resist the devil. Remember that word - resist - we'll see it again in a minute. But how do you resist the devil? You obey God and draw near to him in obedience. This is a promise from James: If you resist temptations the devil will flee. Why? Because if you're not going to fall into sin, he's got better things to do. He could be out tempting other people who are going to cave into sin.

And it doesn't mean he won't come back and tempt some more, but steadfast obedience is one sure way to get rid of him. That's why James says "cleanse your hands, purify your hearts." **Read 8-9**

This isn't ultra spiritual language here. This is just an OT way of saying stop sinning. Stop laughing about sin, laughing about disobedience and pride and immorality.

You know one of the ways the world gets us to buy into sin? It's through comedy and laughter. We used to watch the TV show Friends - it's clever and funny. But what we realized was that part of what the show does is make sin seem funny and appealing. I mean, adultery is bad. But if you can make it a running joke between Ross and Rachel or Chandler and Monica it doesn't seem so bad. In fact, you want them to get together.

And if those names don't mean anything to you, just pick almost any romantic comedy movie or television show and ask yourself if you ever find yourself rooting for the people committing adultery. Are you glad when they get together? Do you laugh at their sin? Will Smith's movie Hitch is great until you realize that happens throughout the whole movie. That's what Satan wants us to do. Laugh at sin, enjoy it.

God says to let our laughter over sin be turned to mourning and our joy to gloom. God is not a killjoy. God is not opposed to laughing and being joyful. He wants us to have joy. But he is opposed to laughing and rejoicing over sin because that's what Satan wants: he wants us to laugh over those things.

Here's what God wants. **Read 10**

Humility is rejoicing in what God rejoices in. It's taking delight in obeying his laws and fleeing from any attempt of Satan to draw us away.

Look over at **1 Pet. 5:6-11**. Here we have a lot of the same themes. Humility, resisting the devil. But there are a couple other things to note. **Read**

So the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour. He's not idle, not just standing around waiting for something to happen. He is on the move looking for a way to plunge people into sin and despair and hopelessness. He is active among believers.

Not in a theoretical way, not in a he's out there somewhere. No, the devil and his angels are active our world and their goal is to destroy us. And we know how.

Vs. 8 encourages self-control. Lack of self-control a means of Satan to destroy you. The fruit of the Spirit is self-control, so what the devil wants is you to be whimsical, careless, thoughtless.

Vs. 9 says to resist the devil. **Read**

One way the devil tempts us is to waiver in our faith, waiver in whether or not the love of God has been poured out on us through Jesus Christ. Waiver in whether or not we are truly justified in Christ. Waiver as to whether or not we are God's children. Doubt is a huge trick of the devil. "Am I even saved?!" Are you trusting - right now - in the righteousness of Christ alone for your justification? If so then yes. That's a promise from God.

Peter calls us to stand firm because our brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of sufferings. Which means the devil is using what to devour us? Persecution. Persecution can often make us sin. When the going gets tough, we fold. No, stand firm. Draw near to God.

I want to look at one last section. **Turn to Eph. 6:10-18**.

Most people consider the foremost passage on spiritual warfare in the New Testament because not only does it list our enemies, but it lists how to protect ourselves from spiritual attack.

The bottom line is that the enemy is spiritual - Satan and his demons - so our defense has to be spiritual as well. Not angelic, but with truth given to us by God the Holy Spirit in his Word. **Read 10-12**

So we put on this armor, we put it on by faith so that we can withstand the devil. Notice that our whole battle is not against flesh and blood. Even when it's people who are persecuting us, people who are mowing our brothers and sisters down around the world. The reason they do that is a spiritual reason - a demonic reason.

There are forces at play that we can't see: rulers, authorities, powers, spiritual forces. Those are all terms for demonic activity.

People want to try to get really specific about what those are. The truth is we don't know exactly what they are and it doesn't really matter because the defense is the same. The goal of all of this is to stand. You'll notice that word over and over in this section. The battle will rage, Satan and demons will do their worst, the question is at the end of the day will you be standing? Here's how to stand. **Read 13-14**

You want to wage true spiritual warfare it's about the truth you're clinging to. Not walks or spiritual mapping or hexes. It's about truth. Fasten on the belt of truth.

In John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress Christian says the only thing more sure and solid than the earth and the universe is the Word of God. Because heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word of God will never pass away. Strap biblical truth to yourself and the rest of the armor stays on.

The breastplate of righteousness. The devil is going to go for critical mass and the only thing that will protect you from caving in to those is to strap on the righteousness of Christ. It's not your righteousness that's going to help you when you're tempted to doubt. It's remembering that by faith you are armored with the righteousness of Christ and it doesn't matter how bad you've blown it - because Satan will want to point out how bad you've blown it - by faith you trust that you have the righteousness of Jesus on you. **Read 15-18**

All of these are put on by faith. We are girded with peace that comes with the gospel through faith. The flaming arrows are arrows of doubt which we guard against by trusting in God's promises. How do we know we are saved, by trusting in the Word of God, that salvation is through faith alone.

There is a real spiritual world out there. There is a real spiritual battle being waged. But we don't use worldly means and we don't use New Age-like tactics. We use truth and we stay steadfast so that when all is said and done we may stand against the adversary for the glory of God.

Pray