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Sermon Notes

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Satan's Warfare Unveiled—His Power and His Defeats

Revelation 12:7-17

Every moment, our bodies are assaulted, pummeled by invisible air molecules... science tells us that, at sea level, on a normal day, these invisible physical things press on us so much, they add up to 14.7 pounds per square inch. That's almost 15 pounds of invisible pressure on every square inch of your skin... more than what three 2 liter bottles of soda weigh. Cumulatively, we have the weight of a small car pressing on us at every moment... about one ton total.

We normally don't feel that air pressure—it's part of our normal existence here on planet earth—we do feel it in our ear canals when we are taking off on a jet, or going up a fast elevator in a tall building. But usually, we just ignore that air pressure

Those invisible air molecules pressing on us constantly reminds me of the continual effects of Satan and his demons on us at every moment of our toilsome lives here on earth

Satan is called “the Prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2); angels in other places are likened to winds; “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.” (Heb. 1:7) We are so used to the demons in their continual afflictions that we do not feel their effects on our minds, our bodies, our emotions, our choices and decisions...

I believe if we had one day on earth free from all demonic influence, that would be the sweetest, most peaceful, most energetic day we've ever experienced

God continually protects us from the full effects of demonic power—but they are there, insinuating ideas in our minds, pulling us to do evil things, making us feel bad or angry or depressed or listless...

In 1986, Christian novelist Frank Peretti published a novel called *This Present Darkness*, in which he sought to elucidate the continual warfare that goes on between demons and angels on planet earth... warfare hidden from our eyes, but having a real impact on how we live

Peretti's theology was shaky at some significant points, and the speculation he did in crafting the personalities of both angels and demons may have done more harm than good... but given our scientific and materialistic world view—that physical matter and energy is the sum total of existence in existence—is completely unbiblical

It is clear that scripture wants us to be very aware of the existence and power of the devil and his demons and their schemes:

Ephesians 6:11-13 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Last week: We began to walk through Revelation 12, which pulls the veil back on Satan's hidden activity in assaulting Christ and the people of God throughout history

We looked BACK at Satan's evil actions through King Herod when Jesus Christ was born, moving Herod to slaughter all those infants

This morning, we'll complete walking through this amazing chapter, to look BACK at Satan's original fall from heaven, and to look AHEAD at his final battle in the heavenly realms, and his final attacks on the people of God

For the second week, we are going to peer behind the veil that separates the physical realm from the spiritual. We are going to see by faith the true power behind the events that face the people of God on earth... a malevolent, intelligent, powerful enemy

I. Satan: Powerful but Defeated Foe

A. Central Focus: Satan... the “Dragon”

Revelation 12:3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.

Revelation 12:9 The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.

B. The Purpose of Revelation 12: To Unveil Satan’s Reality, Power, and Defeats

C. Like a Massive Drama... with Key Figures

1. Think of the greatest dramas ever conceived for the stage or the opera or the cinema
 - a. Think of Shakespeare’s tragedies, like Hamlet, with all its intricate plot developments
 - b. Think of Mozart’s operas, like Don Giovanni, with its awesome, dramatic music and its expensive and lavish set designs
 - c. Think of the 1959 film classic “Ben Hur” starring Charlton Heston, from the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studio, which had the largest budget (over \$15 million) and the largest sets ever built up to that time... overpowering drama, astonishing chariot race, powerful climax
2. None of the human dramas concocted by the imagination of man can equal the drama of this chapter
3. Four key figures
 - a. The Woman

Revelation 12:1-2 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. ² She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

Best to see this as the nation Israel, God's covenant people, from whom the human ancestry of Christ was devolved

The fact that she has other children refers to the woman Zion who is in labor with her children

Isaiah 66:8 Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children.

- b. The Dragon... Satan... already described in verse 3 and verse 9
- c. The Male Child

Revelation 12:5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

- d. The Woman's Children

Genuine believers in Christ, both Jew and Gentile

- 4. Satan's failed attacks make up this drama in various acts
 - a. on the "male child" (vs. 4)
 - b. on heaven (vs. 7-9)
 - c. on the "Woman" and "her children" (vs. 6, 13-17)

D. Last Week: Satan's failed attack on the Male Child

Revelation 12:4-5 The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. ⁵ She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.

- 1. Moving King Herod to kill the babies in Bethlehem
- 2. Moving Jesus' enemies to try to kill him before his time
- 3. But in the end, Christ followed the plan of God, laid down his life at the right time on the cross, was raised from the dead on the third day, and ascended to heaven

4. The text says that God snatched him up to heaven, where the Dragon could not attack him
5. But the Dragon had ambitions to conquer heaven, and there was battle in heaven
6. And though Christ is out of his reach, the Dragon is still able to attack Christ's people on earth, and that is the focus of the last part of this chapter
7. These two battles will be the focus of our sermon today

II. War in Heaven: Satan Cast Down (vs. 7-12)

A. War in Heaven Described

1. Simple assertion:

Revelation 12:7 And there was war in heaven...

2. The combatants

Revelation 12:7 Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.

- a. Michael is one of only two named angels in the Bible... the other being Gabriel
- b. In Jude 9, he is called an "Archangel"... literally a ruler angel
- c. He is revealed in Daniel 10, 12 as being in some sense a special protector of the Jewish nation
- d. The nature of ANGELIC WARFARE is very difficult to comprehend...
- e. The angels cannot (it seems) die or even be wounded in the normal sense...
- f. But there is clearly mighty warfare that occurs... FORCE exerted and resisted
- g. And it seems God does not weigh in with his OMNIPOTENCE, making the angel vs demon warfare essentially equal

- h. BUT there IS AN OUTCOME!!
- 3. Satan and his angels LOSE to Michael and are THROWN DOWN from heaven

Revelation 12:8-9 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down-- that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

- a. Satan is established as TOO WEAK to defeat Michael and his angels
- b. Satan's punishment is STRONGLY EMPHASIZED by repetition
- c. They "lost their place in heaven"... the great dragon was "hurled down"... he was "hurled to the earth", and all his angels with him

B. How Satan is Described

1. The "great dragon": one commentator called this "a picture of the primeval power of chaos"... called "great" because of his enormous power
2. "that ancient serpent": a clear reference to Satan's masquerade in the Garden of Eden, where he tempted Adam and Eve... his "ancient" nature refers to his impact on all of human history
3. Called "the devil"... "diabolus"... deceiver
4. Satan: literally accuser or adversary in court
5. Who leads the whole world astray:

1 John 5:19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

- a. He leads the world into sin by temptations
- b. He accuses sinners before the throne of God
- c. He specifically leads the world astray from faith in Christ

2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

This is the one whom Michael and his angels defeated and threw down to earth

C. The Celebration of the Victory

Revelation 12:10-12 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

1. There is great joy in heaven over this stage of the victory over Satan
2. The LOUD VOICE in heaven refers perhaps to an angel leading the heavenly celebration
3. The voice celebrates the coming of the SALVATION and POWER and KINGDOM of our God, and the AUTHORITY of his Christ with this defeat of Satan
4. What is specifically rejoiced in is that Satan, the ACCUSER of the brothers (i.e. Christians, both men and women around the world) is CAST DOWN
 - a. Satan is particularly wicked in that he BOTH allures people into sin and then turns and accuses them of that sin
 - b. In this celebration song, the accusations Satan pours forth against the children of God are continual... he accuses them BEOFRE OUR GOD DAY AND NIGHT

5. These Christians OVERCAME SATAN by their faith in Christ... by the BLOOD OF THE LAMB and the word of their testimony
- a. Jesus conquered Satan and the world for us

John 16:33 In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

- b. Remember this idea in each of the seven churches: "To him who overcomes, I will give..."
- c. Also John's statement

1 John 5:4-5 everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

- d. Also Paul

Romans 8:35-37 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

6. These heroes STOOD FIRM for Christ even in the face of great suffering

Revelation 12:11 they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

All throughout history, the gospel has been most vigorously advanced by men and women who would rather die than deny Christ... like Polycarp who was ready to be burned at the stake than deny his king who had never done him any harm for 86 years... or Jan Huss who said "What I preached with my lips I now seal with my life" or the Roman noblewoman Perpetua who said to her Roman judge, "While I live I shall defeat you, and if you kill me, I shall defeat you even more."

Or Paul who knew he was about to be attacked in Jerusalem but said

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

BUT... at the end of time, the number of martyrs and the extreme nature of their suffering will go up exponentially... they will be facing the Dragon and his greatest servant, the Antichrist, and they will pay for their faith in Christ with their lives

They are worthy of eternal honor, because they did not love their lives here on earth so much:

As Jesus said in his call to all disciples:

Matthew 10:37-39 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

What about you?? Do you love your life here on earth too much? Do you love your comforts and your reputation too much to share Christ with a boss or coworker or neighbor or lost relative or roommate?

With shame, we must confess that we often love our lives in this world too much... and bring our souls to God in prayer to get him to sever the strong connection between us and the world

7. Joy to heaven, woe to the earth

Revelation 12:12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

8. The WOE has to do with the RAGE of Satan in the final 3 ½ years of history that he is about to unleash on the Woman and her children

D. Now... WHEN did this battle happen... or when WILL this battle happen??

1. First possibility: this refers to the original fall of Satan back before the Garden of Eden, as we discussed last week
 - a. As we discussed last time, God created Satan very good and beautiful (Ezekiel 28:12-15)
 - b. But Satan became prideful of his beauty and enamored with his power (Ezekiel 28:15-17)
 - c. Isaiah 14:12-15 makes it plain that Satan became ambitious and sought to topple God from his throne; But he was defeated and thrown down to the earth
2. Second possibility: this refers to his losing his ability to accuse the Saints before God's throne in heaven because of Christ's death...

Satan has ACCESS to the throne of God in the Old Testament:

Revelation 12:10 For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

- a. Two clear examples: Job 1, and Zechariah 3

Job 1:6-12 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. ⁷ The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it." ⁸ Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." ⁹ "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. ¹⁰ "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹ But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face." ¹² The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.

Zechariah 3:1-5 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. ² The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?" ³ Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. ⁴ The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." Then he said to Joshua, "See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you." ⁵ Then I said, "Put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him, while the angel of the LORD stood by.

- b. Jesus' atonement finally puts an end to Satan's accusations of the saints

Revelation 12:11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony

- c. However... what does Michael have to do with this? When Christ ascended into heaven, there is no other reference to a battle in heaven between Satan and Michael
3. Third possibility: this refers to a yet future defeat at the end of the world, when Satan will be hurled to the earth for the final phase of human history and loses his access to the throne of God THEN
- a. This seems most likely, because it lines up with the 1260 days/42 months/3 ½ years (time, times and half a time) referring to the end of the world
 - b. He is enraged because he knows his time is short

Key book: Daniel, which depicts the activity of the archangel Michael (next week)

- E. Woe to the Earth!! The final phase of the Dragon's warfare

Revelation 12:12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

III. War on Earth: Satan Pursues the Woman and Her Children (vs. 6, 12-17)

A. First Indication: Verse 6

Revelation 12:6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

1. After the woman gives birth to the male child he is snatched up to heaven where the devil cannot reach him
2. So Satan turns his attention to her, and she is protected for 1260 days
3. These 1260 days are an interpretive key to this chapter... it is a consistent counting of the days in which the people of God have to suffer extreme persecution by the Dragon
4. The fleeing of the woman into the desert is picked up again at the end of the chapter

B. The Devil Focuses on the Woman, Still on Earth

Revelation 12:13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child.

1. Verse 6 shows the protection in the desert... verse 13 the other half of the equation... Satan's chasing of the woman to kill her
2. The desert represents a place of refuge where it is difficult to find refugees fleeing for their lives; God has prepared a place of refuge for her as she runs for her life... like Elijah running from wicked Ahab and Jezebel into the desert, where God fed him with food brought by ravens and a mountain stream
3. The story develops with more detail in the next verse

Revelation 12:14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach.

- a. The “two wings of a great eagle” implies speed in her flight... also soaring high above the earth, the eagle is unreachable by earthly powers
- b. The wings of God often imply protection and provision

Deuteronomy 32:10-11 In a desert land God found Israel, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, ¹¹ like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.

4. Again, note the time frame in which God cares for her in the desert... “a time, times, and half a time”... = 3 ½ years = 1260 days = 42 months
5. A clear prediction of the final phase of human history (Daniel 9)

C. A River Spewed from Satan’s Mouth, Swallowed Up

Revelation 12:15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.

1. The dragon is often portrayed as a fire breathing monster

Job 41:18-19 His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. ¹⁹ Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out.

2. I don’t know what this symbolizes... but Satan is in the habit of using human minions to do his evil bidding... Jeremiah saw the invasion of the Babylonians like a flow of hot liquid from a pot

Jeremiah 1:13-15 The word of the LORD came to me again: "What do you see?" "I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north," I answered. ¹⁴ The LORD said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. ¹⁵ I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the LORD. "Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem

3. Speaking plainly, it seems that the Jewish nation, deceived by the Antichrist concerning the temple, is now running for its life and looking for refuge from his forces
4. The river might refer to actual soldiers sent out by the Antichrist to follow the fleeing Jews and slaughter them
5. BUT God controls heaven and earth, and this time mobilizes the earth to save the woman

Revelation 12:16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

6. Reminds me of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their revolt against Moses, how the ground opened its mouth to swallow them

D. The Final Phase

Revelation 12:17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring-- those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

1. The rest of the woman's children represent other believers on earth during the time of the Antichrist who will be the focus of Satan's vicious attacks, and many of them will die martyr's deaths
2. The final phase of Satan's hate-filled attack on Christ by attacking his children on earth will precipitate the Second Coming to rescue them
3. We're going to discuss some vital details about the Antichrist and the timing of the final persecution from the Book of Daniel next week; this will serve as a hinge between Revelation 12 and Revelation 13
 - a. Revelation 12 speaks of the Dragon's attack on the woman (Israel or Zion) and her children (believers on earth, whether Jews or Gentiles)
 - b. Revelation 13 speaks of the Beast (the Antichrist) who will be Satan's human instrument for that vicious attack

IV. Applications

A. Come to Christ!

1. Satan, the Great Dragon, is said here to LEAD THE WHOLE WORLD ASTRAY
2. He is the deceiver, and everyone outside of Christ is blinded by his deceptions

2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

3. By the word of God alone and by the Holy Spirit alone will you be able to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ
4. By the word of God alone and by the Holy Spirit alone will you be able to see your sin clearly and repent of your sins while there is time

Christians:

B. Put On Your Spiritual Armor and FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT

1. We are not unaware of the devil's schemes
2. He is exceptionally skillful at alluring us into sin
3. We are commanded to put on the full armor of God and take our stand against the devil's schemes, his temptations

C. Don't Allow Satan to Accuse You of Guilt!

Revelation 12:10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

Romans 8:33-35 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Overcome Satan's accusations and his dark Kingdom like this:

Revelation 12:11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

If you have sinned, confess it to God!! Allow him to cleanse you!

D. Do Not Love Your Life in this World Too Much

Matthew 16:24-25 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Imitate Paul's single-minded devotion to Christ and to his mission:

Acts 20:24 "I consider my life worth nothing to me..."

For Holiness

1 Corinthians 9:27 I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

And for evangelism and missions:

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.