

A dialogue sermon with Lee Eclov and Sean Christensen

Introduction:

- A. There is someone who wants to kill you, body and soul. He cares nothing whatsoever about you. You're a means to an end. He lies to you anytime and every time he has your attention. He deceives you. He is wickedly clever. He hates the Lord you love. He can whisper or roar. He can quote the Bible. He can be disguised in light. He has a vast army at his command. But *"the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."*
- B. Christians don't always know the Bible basics about the devil. *Illus.:* I enjoy the fake, satirical news items in the *Babylon Bee*. The *fake* headline a couple weeks ago read, "Report: 97% of Evangelicals' Demonology Now Based On CW Show 'Supernatural'." I've never seen that show but according to the *fake* survey results, *"a full 80% of evangelical pastors recommend warding off demonic attacks using methods like shotguns filled with rock salt, complex devil traps carved into floors and ceilings, and 'special,' demon-killing knives."*

Well, we need to do better than that so this morning Sean Christensen and I would like to give you an overview of some of what the Bible teaches. Sean, as many of you know is a Ph.D. student in New Testament. A couple months ago we were visiting about this upcoming series and I was learning so much from him that at one point I said, *"We should just have this conversation in front of the congregation."* So, refined a bit since then, that's our goal.

Sean, explain how you got interested in this subject of the Bible's teaching on Satan.

[Lee] We should begin with who the devil is and where he came from.

I. THE DEVIL IS AN ANGEL WHO REBELLED AGAINST GOD AND WHO LED A GREAT NUMBER OF OTHER ANGELS IN THAT REVOLT

- A. **Rev. 12:7-9** – *"Then war broke out in heaven. Michael [who is also a great angel; or archangel] and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 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."* The devil is evidently an **archangel**—high-ranking, like Michael.
- B. These demonic powers are organized in a kind of great hierarchy. Paul says in Eph. 6:12, *"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."*
- C. Satan is the "ruler of this world" (John 14:30) and "the ruler of the kingdom of the air" (Eph 2:2). Satan is most definitely *not* in hell. That is *not* his kingdom. It is his dreaded destiny.

[Lee] Sean, the devil's sins are described in various places in the Bible. Jesus said he is "the father of lies" and a "murderer." The word 'devil' means accuser or slanderer. But what is Satan's fundamental fault? **[Sean explains]**

II. PRIDE AND ENVY ARE AT THE HEART OF ALL SATAN DOES

- A. His character: Touch on Satan's classification as envious (most common across a variety of texts). We frequently see envy and pride discussed together, they both fall within the

realm of self-sufficiency. Thus in taking his stand against God and His people, Satan motivated by His pride and envy is focused entirely on himself

- B. His influence: Along with this, we see throughout Scripture that Satan wants to lead people away from recognizing their need for God. He wants others to be classified as self-sufficient, exhibiting the same characteristics of pride and envy that he himself displays
- C. That reminds me of the two quotes **C. S. Lewis** puts at the very beginning of his devil-mocking book, *The Screwtape Letters*. First he quotes **Martin Luther**: “*The best way to drive out the devil, if he will not yield to the texts of Scripture, is to jeer and flout him, for he cannot bear scorn.*” And then **Thomas More**: “*The devil .. the prowde spirite.. cannot endure to be mocked.*”

III. THE SERPENT IN GEN 3

- A. **Sean**, the first appearance of the devil in the Bible is Gen. 3 where he tempts Eve and Adam to sin. Where is the devil’s pride and envy in that story?
[Josephus: “*the serpent, living in the company of Adam and his wife, grew envious of the blessings which he supposed were destined for him if they obeyed God’s behests.*” – p.9]
 - We have examples of texts like this from Josephus in dozens of Jewish writings
 - **While we are not told explicitly, it appears that Jewish tradition generally associated the devil’s envy with either: 1) envy of the unique creation of mankind in the image of God, or 2) envy of God Himself for the worship due Him of His creation (we see this perhaps later in the temptation narrative, when Satan seeks to influence Jesus to worship him)**
- B. So God’s curse on the serpent is not only harsh but really demeans him: **Gen 3:14-15...**
*So the Lord God said to the serpent,
“Because you have done this,
“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”*
[Lee] I read the explanation, “What the serpent represents in the physical world, Satan is in the spiritual world.”

After that story we don’t read much at all about the devil in the Old Testament. Is he there?

IV. SATAN’S PRESENCE IN THE OT IS EVIDENT IN FALSE GODS AND IDOLATRY

- A. [Sean] We see false gods, represented by idols, throughout the OT. In fact, worshiping false gods is the most basic sin and scourge of Israel throughout most of the OT. Those false gods and idols disguise demonic powers. **Ps 106:36-37 (ESV)**,
*They served their idols,
which became a snare to them.*

*They sacrificed their sons
and their daughters to the demons;*

1 Cor 10:19-21: “...the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.”

- B. [Lee] Those demons, operating through idols, had the same agenda that the serpent did in the Garden of Eden—discrediting God and provoking soul-deadening disobedience among all they can entice to worship them. **All because of pride and envy.**
- C. [Sean] When God delivered Israel from Egypt remember how he completely discredited and defeated the gods of Egypt through the 10 plagues.
(Another example might be the Philistines worshipping Dagon in 1 Samuel 5, where ark of God causes the idol of Dagon to fall and break into pieces). Even if there is power in the demonic idols, they are certainly subsidiary to God’s authority.
- D. [Lee] So when God led Israel out of Egypt and into a world where everyone but them worshiped idols his first command in **Ex 20:1-5** is:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

“You shall have no other gods before me.

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...”

Later, in **Deut 18:10-12** God addressed other ways Satan works: “*Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord;*” Those things are still forbidden to us today because they are the disguised activities of the devil and they lead us deep into trouble. There is a human fascination with anything that offers us a glimpse through the curtain of death—to speak with the dead. And we people want to know and affect the future so Satan provides us with demonically inspired means.

[Sean] With the connection with idolatry, we might say that Satan has manipulated what is a good desire, the desire of created beings for worship of their Creator, and distorted it.

[Lee] **Sean**, the name used most in the Bible is *the devil* but we think of his name as Satan. Where does that come from?

[Sean] The word *Satan* means *adversary (or accuser)*, and the term “devil” comes from the Greek equivalent. They are both essentially names that are driven by the evil character of Satan himself. He is an adversary, and accuser, a slanderer.

V. SATAN IS GOD’S ADVERSARY AND OURS

- A. [Sean] We see a good general example of this character in a passage that Pastor Lee will preach on in a couple of weeks, in 1 Pet 5:8:
“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy (or adversary) the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (NIV)
- B. What is clear is that the character that yields this name, Satan or the devil, is now manifest in his hatred for God and His people. I believe it was Martin Luther who once referred to Satan as a toothless lion because of the cross of Christ. And while this is true

in a sense, he is nonetheless an active opposition, a real threat who seeks to discredit God's people, and limit the advance of God's kingdom.

- C. [Lee] Since the name *the devil* means he is the accuser or slanderer, we can conclude that Satan's most common way of attacking—his go-to adversarial action—is to accuse. And his accusations against human beings seem to **accuse people before God as well as in their own minds that we are not worthy of God's blessing**. Satan wants to cut us off from the goodness and grace of God. He is like a great and effective tattle-tale. He wants to keep people from God's blessings because without those blessings we will follow him and be vulnerable to his soul-deadening temptations.
- D. [Lee] Why is he fighting God and God's people? What's his beef? [Sean] It goes back to **his pride and envy**...
- We've seen that Satan was often characterized by pride and envy that led to the entrance of sin into the world, and this remains true to this day.
 - Satan has taken his stand in opposition and in self-reliance away from God, and in his pride he wants to influence others to do the same.
- E. [Lee] So **just how does he fight against God?** [Sean] By seeking to destroy the glory of God's creation—mankind—by sin. And by attacking God's people through temptation, lies, false guilt...
1. Note also that he fights against God by preventing others from coming to Christ, 2 Cor 4:4 says that "the god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelieving to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ". In a sense we should be reminded and stirred when compassion when we understand that the sometimes harsh rejection of Christ and reckless living of people we may know is not only of their own doing, but is also influenced by the attack of God's enemy
- F. [Lee] **The first time that name Satan appears is in Job 1-2.** While our Bible translations identify Satan, the literal translation is "*the adversary*." So it is possible that this isn't about the devil, per se. [Sean: clarify briefly]
- Some of the issue centers around the presence of the definite article, where the text in Job 1 essentially says "the Satan" or "the Adversary". Some think that this is a snapshot of the heavenly realm with one of the angels in heaven
 - Others think that this could be the personal figure that we know as Satan, but that the name itself was not yet a known personal name for the evil angelic being
- [Sean] So we have this intriguing scenario (Job 1:6-7)
- One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan [the adversary] also came with them. The Lord said to Satan [the adversary], "Where have you come from?"*
- Satan [The adversary] answered the Lord, "From roaming throughout the earth, going back and forth on it."*
- [Lee] And in the following interaction God asks this adversarial character if he has considered the most upright man on earth—Job. And this adversary says, "*Does Job fear God for nothing. Do you think he has no motivation to be so good? You give him everything. You've blessed his socks off. Take away the blessings and he won't be so devout.*" So this adversary questions whether Job is really worthy of God's blessing on his life. And that sets up the rest of the book.
- [Lee] We see another example of this name—the accuser—in **Zech 3:1-2**, "*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. 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?'"

[Sean] Then in **Rev. 12:10-11**, "*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 Messiah.*

***For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.***

***They triumphed over 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..."***

[Lee] So here Satan, who is identified in the verses just before this, appears to be accusing believers before God that they are not worthy of God's salvation because their triumphant defense is "*the blood of the Lamb and their testimony.*"

Here's what happens: Satan tempts us to sin and to lie-infested thinking then he **accuses** us before God, the righteous Judge. So God must judge and condemn sinners whom he created and loves. And Satan **accuses us to ourselves** through our inward guilt and shame. Just as with Adam and Eve our guilt and shame drive us to hide from God and to try to conceal our sin and shame. And all this, by Satan's intention, keeps us from the God who loves us. So you can see how wonderful Jesus' death is for our sin. "*God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" And now we can "*come boldly to God's throne*" without fear or guilt or shame, because we have overcome Satan by "*the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.*"

[Lee] There are two other similar passages that are sometimes thought to describe Satan.

[Sean] Yes, **Is. 14:12-15** and **Ezek. 28:12-15**, which each describe God's destruction of a proud king—the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre. But the language seems to be describing someone more powerful and proud than any earthly king. But I've heard that most Bible scholars, including Calvin, don't actually think these are about Satan. Could you explain? (In the interest of time, let's just focus on **Is 14**.)

¹² *How you have fallen from heaven,
morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth,
you who once laid low the nations!*

¹³ *You said in your heart,
"I will ascend to the heavens;*

*I will raise my throne
above the stars of God;
I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,
on the utmost heights of Mount Zaphon.*

¹⁴ *I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High."*

¹⁵ *But you are brought down to the realm of the dead,
to the depths of the pit.*

[Lee] Well, that certainly sounds like it is describing the devil!

[Sean:]

VI. THE PRIDE OF THESE KINGS AND THE PRIDE AND DOWNFALL OF SATAN

- A. These are each expressly about these two kings. There is evidence that language like this really was used of earthly kings in those days.
1. The language certainly sounds different, speaking frequently of ascent and descent with language that refers to a morning star
 2. One of the things that we should note though is that when God commands the prophet to proclaim a song over Babylon, we should not be surprised that He might draw upon language or imagery that a Babylonian king might resonate with. So it is interesting that in a number of texts outside of Scripture from the ANE context, we find descriptions of kings wanting to ascend and descend. We learn of their belief that when kings died they became stars. And so when we hear in Isa 14:13 the desire to ascend above the stars of heaven, it would be quite easy to picture the boasts of a prideful and arrogant king. A self-sufficient king
- B. We do see these verses from Isaiah appearing in the NT.
1. Description of Antiochus Epiphanes in 2 Macc 9:8-11
 2. The death of Herod Agrippa in Acts—Luke draws upon the language of Ezek 28 in order to describe the scene of Herod’s acceptance of divine praise, and his subsequent death (note the reversal theme)
 3. Luke 10 re/ Capernaum and Satan. Satan fell like lightning when Jesus’ disciples came against his demons in Jesus’ name. But the language is also applied to Capernaum. Suddenly the language of the prideful ruler of the OT does not just apply to the individual or to Satan, but to all who deny the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The text in Luke 10 essentially defines for us whom those who are in the precarious position of the prideful, self-sufficient individual are = all those who resist the gospel of Jesus Christ!
- C. The key thing in these texts is the theological point—those who are characterized by pride and who seek to exalt themselves, with no dependence upon God, will ultimately be humbled. These are encouraging texts about God’s faithfulness to His covenant people, who were surrounded by hostility all around
- D. [Lee] Even if they do not describe Satan or his fall directly the description of their pride certainly fits him because there is no pride among men that isn’t outmatched by the pride of Satan. There is no arrogant aspiration toward supremacy anywhere among men that is not dwarfed by Satan’s own desire to displace God. **We cannot overstate Satan’s pride nor exaggerate his envy.**

[Lee] Well, we’ve barely touched on the NT but I will do that in the sermons to come, including one about demons. But let’s move to your special interest, the passage in **1 Pet 5**. You’ve thought a lot about how these pieces fit together and informed Peter as well as James when they wrote to the churches.

VII. PETER AND JAMES WARN THE CHURCH ABOUT THE DANGER THE DEVIL POSES TO BELIEVERS

- A. [Sean] Both James and Peter have similar warnings, but the **tone** of each is different. James is hard-hitting, **sharp: James 4:4-10....**

1. Key in James is that the context is rebuke: it is a Christian community characterized by what James calls “wisdom from below” and “demonic”—envy, pride, selfish ambition, jealousy, desire. It is in this context that he calls for us to resist the devil
 2. For this community who is in the midst of their prideful self-focus, the way that the devil is attacking is internal to the community. It is through Christian infighting, a lack of concern for brothers and sisters in Christ
 3. James gives both the means of change: 1) prayer in dependence on God; 2) repent; as well as a reason to do so: a warning that it is those who humble themselves who will be exalted (following the fate of Christ)
- B. Peter is more consoling: 1 **Pet 5:5-9...**
- ⁵ *In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”*
- ⁶ *Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.* ⁷ *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*
- ⁸ *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* ⁹ *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*
1. Unlike James, there is no evidence that Peter is addressing a situation of pride within the church
 2. Instead, the threat is external, Christians ostracized in public, looked down upon. Perhaps in that context the desire would be to take matters into their own hands. To resist, to lash out, to ridicule in return.
 3. Instead Peter also says, “humble yourselves and you will be exalted”
 4. He says, like James, establish your dependence on God in prayer “because He cares for you”
 5. And He says draw encouragement that even if you are marginalized socially, you are a part of a new family, a great family, with an inheritance that is imperishable
- C. [Lee] So Sean, I’ll preach on this passage in a few weeks but for you, as a pastor, what would you want to drive home to God’s people?
- [Sean]
- We resist the devil when we recognize that we live each day ultimately dependent on God
 - We resist the devil when we place the needs of others above our own desires, ambitions, and selfish motives
 - We resist the devil when we turn to God when anxiety threatens, knowing that He is not burdened by our honesty because He cares for us
 - We resist the devil when we pursue unity and compassion as a church, turning away from desires to criticize or unhelpfully compare
 - We resist the devil when we recognize our own pride, and are quick to repent
 - We resist the devil when we are not disillusioned by cultural demise or personal attack, knowing that we will share in Christ's glory
 - We resist the devil when we recognize that we are not marginalized citizens of a state or country, but those who are 'in Christ' and inheritors of the kingdom of God

- We resist the devil when we recognize that he is already a defeated foe, and we joyfully continue to follow King Jesus on a road to glory