

Sermon Given by

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The teaching of Jesus on... The Devil

Field Marshall Montgomery or 'Monty' as he was known was one of the great leaders of the Allied Forces in WW2. Amongst other jobs he commanded the Eighth Army in the North African desert.

During that North African campaign Montgomery lived in a caravan and it's said that hanging up on one of the sides of the caravan Monty had a portrait of his great rival, this man up on the screen, the German Field Marshall Rommel, - the 'Desert Fox.' In this way Monty was forced to be aware of his cunning enemy.

The same sort of thing happens in sport. So for example in the recent Ashes series 'Down Under' the English bowlers did their homework on the enemy – the Australian batsmen. They knew that Philip Hughes was susceptible to the short ball early in his innings; they knew that they would need to nag away with line and length bowling to Mike Hussey denying him scoring opportunities; they knew that Marcus North was very weak against the off spin of Graeme Swann and so on. They had specific bowling plans for each Australian batsmen. They knew their enemy!

Well today we're looking at Jesus' teaching on our enemy the devil, to try to paint a portrait of our enemy and to remind ourselves that we, if we're Christians, are in a war zone. We're going to expose him and his tactics so we'll be better equipped to fight him.

First though we're going to look at what the world says about the devil. And the world tends to fall into one of two traps about the devil.

The first trap is assuming that the devil does not exist. With the secularisation of Western society there's been an increasing scepticism about the devil's existence.

So at the same time as people have come to believe less and less in the existence of the God of the Bible there's been a parallel shift of belief concerning the devil. And even amongst professing Christians this has been the case.

Liberal theology, which wrongly and dangerously puts human reason above what the Bible says, so taking out those bits that seem unpleasant or impossible, discounts the Biblical account of demonic activity.

In the liberal theologian's view, angels, whether fallen or not, including the devil, belong to the realm of myth and reflect an outside and pagan influence on the writers of Scripture.

Dr Rudolf Bultman, one of the most renowned NT scholars of the last century, made in the 1940s in the midst of WW2 his infamous plea that we should demythologise the NT.

“It is impossible”, he maintained, “at the same time to believe in the world of angels and devils and to make use of aeroplanes and electric light. The scientific age in which we now live has made it impossible for us to hold these naïve views about the demonic which our forefathers took for granted.”

Like Bultman 70 years ago so most people today would dismiss Satan as inappropriate for for the cool light of the 21st Century.

He’s depicted like this figure on the screen as some cardboard figure of devilish fun with horns and cloven hoof who has no right to be taken seriously.

So you might have seen the Smirnoff ads at the cinemas or the film ‘Bedevilled’ – they are typical of the way in which the world has lightened the devil. At the Halloween shows of X-Factor and Strictly Come Dancing last term several of the acts dressed as the devil – it seems he’s just a figure of fun. And we need to beware falling into this wrong thinking.

In his superb book “The Screwtape Letters”, C.S. Lewis explains that one of Satan’s greatest tactics is to persuade us not to take him seriously.

At one point Screwtape (the senior devil) is telling Wormwood (a junior devil) how to ensure people don’t follow Jesus, and to make sure they do follow the ways of the evil one.

This is what Screwtape says: “If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that...he therefore cannot believe in you.”

Satan loves it when we fall for the caricature of a devil with horns, a pointed tail and a pitchfork in his hand, for then we don’t take him seriously. We doubt he exists at all; and so we don't pray either against his schemes, or for protection from him.

So the world says the devil does not exist and yet at the same time there is today a worldwide interest in and fascination with the occult. This is the second trap that people fall into.

We hear much of black magic, white magic, exorcism, horoscopes, tarrot cards and ouja boards.

There’s been a rush on the part of publishers, playwrights and film-producers to cash in on this fascination and so feed it even more.

It’s not insignificant that the film ‘The Exorcist’ had the record for some time for the biggest box office returns in history. If the rate of inflation and the rise in the price of cinema tickets since 1973, the year of its release, are taken into account, the film grossed the equivalent of more than £238 million in today’s terms.

The music industry as well has become infected with this obsession in the satanic. The group Black Sabbath have held black masses on stage during concerts. The group KISS I’m told stands for Knights in Satan’s Service. The Rolling Stones recorded an album live at a voodoo ritual and Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin fame used to run Britain’s largest occult bookshop.

So on the one hand the world doesn't take the Devil seriously but holds him up as a figure of fun and on the other the world takes the Devil too seriously, giving him far too much attention. And the devil is delighted with these two attitudes.

So we need to listen carefully as we look now at what the Lord Jesus says about the Devil less we get sucked into one or other of the world's attitudes.

We've got four headings for what Jesus says about the Devil and our first heading is **The Devil is a powerful enemy**

Please turn to Acts 26:18, that's on p1124 The Apostle Paul is on trial before King Agrippa and gives an account of his conversion and his meeting with the risen Lord Jesus. I'll read from v15: 'Then I asked, 'Who are you Lord?' " 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'

Here's the key bit for us - "...I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God..."

So straight away we see that Jesus believed in the Devil's existence. It's a basic of Christianity that there is personal force of evil, depraved and malicious. And Jesus tells us in this verse that every non-Christian is under his authority.

As a citizen of the United Kingdom, I live in one sense under the authority of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her ministers who govern under her. Under her the government controls some of the details of my life. It tells me how much tax I need to pay; it tells me things like what age I can buy alcohol, how fast I can drive, that I can't smoke tobacco in public places and I can't smoke cannabis at all. If I don't like Her Majesty's government I can vote for a new government.

The Bible says that from the moment of our birth the spiritual authority that we live under is Satan.

There's no General Election and if there was we'd always vote for him because we'd think that by doing so we'd be free.

So until November 1996 Tony Heywood was under the authority of Satan but then as I heard the good news about Jesus, God in his grace opened my eyes and I was taken from Satan's grip to Christ's grip.

So Satan is a powerful enemy. This explains why so many people have chosen not to acknowledge Jesus as Lord. There is a powerful rival authority at work. So these words of Christ are a reminder that in our evangelism we need to do two vital things – first we need to pray – it is a spiritual battle and secondly we must tell people the truth about Jesus Christ because only the gospel is powerful to save us from Satan's grip.

Satan is a powerful foe, we're now going to see secondly that **Satan is a liar and a murderer**. Could you turn to John 8:44.

That's on p.... Jesus is in heated conversation with some Jews and in one of the most shocking passages in the Bible Jesus says to them v.44, "...You belong to your father, the devil and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies..."

The devil was a murderer from the beginning and is the father of lies.

Do you remember his lies back in Genesis "Did God really say, you must not eat from any tree in the garden?" He loves to sow doubt in our minds about what God has said and we hear his voice a lot today sadly even from amongst professing Christians. "Does the Bible really say that hell is an actual physical place?" "Can we really take some parts of the OT seriously?" Did Jesus actually walk on water or was it just a sandbank?" "Does Scripture really say there's a difference in role between husbands and wives?" "Does God really say that Jesus will return physically in power to judge the world?" Satan loves to make us doubt God's word and then sometimes he's less subtle.

Sometimes he can't resist the shamefaced lie like in Genesis when he says: "You will not surely die." And we need to be very wary of the lie that says God won't punish human sin.

God does take human sin seriously and he will punish it. We mustn't fall into the devil's trap. Satan is a liar and a liar with murderous intent. Do you remember when Jesus cast the demons out of Legion and how the demons then entered the herd of pigs and led them to their destruction over the cliff.

It's a vivid picture of Satan's desire to lead people to eternal destruction. It's his ambition to take as many people with him to hell as he can. Satan is a liar and a murderer.

Next heading **He's opposed to the Cross** and could you turn to Mark 8:33.

Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Christ. For once Peter's got it right but then we see this dramatic turn around. I'll read from v.31 'He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Jesus had already resisted Satan's attempt to deflect him from the Cross during the temptation in the desert. And here he was at it again.

It's a great illustration of Satan's alarm. He's desperately opposed to Jesus going to the Cross and counter attacks Jesus' teaching on it. Why? Because the Cross is central to Jesus' work. He's happy for Jesus to go anywhere rather than the Cross. He doesn't want Jesus to take the punishment for our sin.

Instead, he wants us to suffer eternally for our sin ourselves. He wants us to go to hell.

And was there ever a more cunning piece of work from Satan than speaking through Peter, Jesus' trusted friend and colleague, a member of the inner circle, a future leader of the church. "Get behind me Satan!" Jesus says, "You think as a man thinks not as God thinks."

Satan is very happy so long as we have thoughts about God that come from man, not from the Bible but our own ideas. He's very happy about liberal theology, which doesn't put Christ's blood as central, but makes the Cross more cosy, seeing it primarily as an example rather than as Jesus bearing God's wrath to pay for our sin.

Satan is behind liberal theology because liberal theology preaches a false cosy gospel, which ultimately achieves nothing but send people to hell.

Jesus is being re-created by modern theologians as largely concerned to give us peace now, healing now and justice now.

These are all good and important things but they are not the gospel. Satan is delighted for our non-Christian friends to come. He'd hate it if they were to come and hear a 20 minute talk on the Cross. Satan is opposed to the Cross and the preaching of it.

Now if all this talk about Satan sounds a bit scary, we need to be clear that although Satan is powerful and active and certainly not to be ignored or laughed at, he is a defeated foe. **Satan is a defeated foe.**

And could you turn to Mark 3 and I'll read from v.22, 'And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact no-one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house."

The logic is straight forward; it can't be by Satan's power that Jesus is working his miracles because Satan's power over people's lives is being broken. It would've been stupid if Montgomery had tried to defeat Rommel by attacking his own troops. Satan's no fool; he wouldn't do that.

So the only conclusion is that the strong man Satan has been overpowered by someone stronger than himself; Jesus. Throughout the gospel accounts we see Jesus' power over Satan.

He refuses to give in to him in the wilderness; he drives out many demons. And of course the climax of the victory comes at the Cross. That was where supremely Jesus won the struggle against Satan. That was why Satan was keen to use Peter to divert Jesus from the Cross and that's why Satan hates it when the Cross is preached.

By taking the punishment for our sin it was as if he tied Satan up so he could rob from Satan men and women whose sin should have taken them to hell.

Now the Devil has no claim on Christians as their punishment has been paid and they belong to Jesus. Now I've got here a newspaper from the day after D-Day. Simon Scott gave it to me. I guess he must have been a little nipper at the time. In fact I hadn't realised that he was quite that old but there we go. Anyhow this paper records the decisive battle of WW2. Landings successful: fighting in streets of Caen. Attack on 80 mile front: Losses light. That major assault sounded a death blow to Hitler. From then on Hitler was a defeated enemy, not yet destroyed, he was still able to attack and inflict losses but his doom was sealed and it was only a matter of time.

Well the same could be said of Satan. The death of Jesus Christ on the Cross was a decisive victory. The devil has been soundly defeated. He's still able to attack us but his doom is sealed. All that remains now is the mopping up operation before every trace of his hostility is removed. He's destined for destruction. As it says in Matthew 25:41, "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" His doom is sealed the fire awaits him.

To sum up then the world is either obsessed with the devil or doesn't believe in him. The mistake we're most likely to make is to not take the devil seriously. We easily buy into the world's view of him as a figure of fun. And as the French poet Charles Baudelaire has put it, 'The devil's cleverest wile is to convince us that he does not exist.' Well we've learnt from Jesus that the devil does exist, that he's a powerful foe, a murderer, a liar and that he's opposed to the Cross. He's a vicious enemy whom we need to take seriously but a mortally wounded one. He's been bound by the stronger man Jesus.

Audio versions of the sermons can be freely downloaded from the All Saints Little Shelford website, <http://www.allsaintslittleshelford.org>. These are available in two formats, mp3 and wma.