

“The Snake Crusher” - Part 1

Text: Genesis 3:1-15

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on December 4, 2018 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** As we begin this advent season, I want to connect two things together that may seem odd, or even bizarre, to you.

I want to talk about Christmas and evil. I want to connect the birth of Jesus with one of the greatest problems people have with Christianity; namely, the problem of evil.

- If God is so good and powerful then why is there so much evil in the world? More personally, if God loves me, why do I suffer? I submit to you that the story of Christmas can offer answers to your intellectual questions and can also provide you with the emotional strength to face the worst of evil and suffering.
- The reason why we do not connect Christmas to evil is that we often fail tell the story of Christmas without setting it within the larger story of the Bible.
 - We pour a cup of hot chocolate, sit under the Christmas lights, and hear a story about an isolated story about a baby being born with cute little animals around him.
 - Jesus birth becomes a comfortable and cozy bedtime story.
- But real life is far removed from such cozy scenes. Under those same Christmas lights, we get in arguments with our family. While Christmas music plays at work, colleagues lash out at each other in anger.
 - What does the manger have to do with the three teachers in Ottawa who were found to be sexually assaulting students over a span of 30 years?
 - What does the birth of Jesus have to do with our Christmas project which seeks to address the fact that approximately 2 million infants around the world will die in their first month of life because of delivery complications, malnutrition, and preventable diseases?
- Over the next four weeks we are going to connect Jesus’ birth to all of this. This series can be summarized with one verse. 1 John 3:8 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 2) “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”**
 - The eternal Son of God appeared in human flesh 2000 years ago. Why did he appear? To destroy the works of the devil. Now obviously we will need to take some time to talk about this idea of believing in the devil but for now just notice that, according to this verse, Christmas is not a cozy and comfortable story removed from real life.
 - Christmas is about war. The Son of God appeared to make war on evil. So over the next four weeks I want to show how the message of Christmas gives some answers to the problem of evil that are intellectual credible, emotionally satisfying, and that should move our hearts to give to the child survival program.
- So today I want to tell you the big story of the Bible through the lens of this idea that the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil.
 - The Bible’s big story can be divided into four major chapters. I don’t mean the actual chapters in the Bible. I mean that if you take the entire story you can tell it in four chapters.
 - They are: creation, fall, redemption, and renewal.

CHAPTER 1: CREATION BY GOD

- Chapter 1 of the big story of the Bible begins on a high point. We can call **(SHOW SLIDE 3) Chapter 1: Creation by God.**

- The very first verse of the Bible says, ***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*** The Bible’s story begins with the fact that God exists and that He created everything that exists.
 - Genesis 1-2 go on to talk about how everything God created was good. Adam and Eve lived in a garden paradise. They enjoyed a harmonious relationship with God, with each other, and with the created order.

CHAPTER 2: FALL INTO SIN

- This brings us to chapter 2 of the Bible’s big story. We can call chapter 2 **(SHOW SLIDE 4) Chapter 2: The Fall into Sin.**
 - This takes place in Genesis 3. Genesis 3 is perhaps the most important part of the Bible because it defines what is wrong with the world.
- At the beginning of chapter 3 something very strange occurs. We suddenly encounter a talking snake. At this point, many people just close the Bible saying, ***“This is ridiculous.”*** Before you close it please recognize that this was just as strange to ancient people as to you and I. Like us they would have had many questions.
 - Who is this serpent? Where did it come from? Is this an actual serpent or is the serpent meant to personify something else?
 - Genesis 3 does not answer most of these questions but over time God pulls back the curtain to reveal who the serpent is. The New Testament asserts that the serpent is actually a supernatural being whom the Bible calls Lucifer, the devil, the destroyer, or Satan. Revelation 12:9 speaks of, ***“that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.”***¹
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 5) The Bible says there is such thing as supernatural personal evil through which evil came into the world.**
- But again, we need to pause because the average person today says, ***“Talking snakes was crazy enough. Are we really being asked to believe in the existence of the devil?”*** At first glance it may be hard to believe but let me ask you to consider three things. **(SHOW SLIDE 6) First, consider your beliefs about God.**
 - Do you believe God exists? Even in secular British Columbia, the vast majority of people say they believe in God.
 - Now what do you believe God is like? The vast majority of people say the answer is obvious: “God is goodness and love.” Okay, if it is so obvious that there is a good and loving supernatural being called “God” who influences people for good then why is it so hard to believe there is a supernatural being that influences people toward evil? It makes logical sense but I think most people have a hard time believing it because they have wrong ideas about what the devil is actually like.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 7) Secondly, consider your assumptions about the devil.**
 - When we think of the devil we typically imagine a guy in red spandex with horns carrying a trident who tortures people in hell.
 - Listen, if you think it is ridiculous to believe in that kind of devil then I am very happy to tell you that the Bible also says it is ridiculous to believe in that kind of devil.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8) Finally, if you have difficulty believing in the devil then, consider your experience of evil.**

¹ See also Revelation 20:2 - “that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan.”

- How do you explain horrific things like the holocaust or teenage boys who shoot their classmates in cold blood?
 - No doubt there are psychological explanations involving mental illness and bad upbringings. No doubt there are sociological factors involving bad environments. But can any of these fully explain such horrific acts?
- Lieutenant-General Romeo Dallaire is a Canadian and was the Force Commander of the United Nations peacekeeping effort in Rwanda. In 1994 he and his men were forced to stand by as Hutu's slaughtered over 1 million Tutsis in 100 days. These were neighbours killing neighbours and most with machetes.
 - Dallaire wrote a famous book entitled, *Shake Hands with the Devil*. In the final paragraph of the preface he writes the following:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 9) “After one of my many presentations following my return from Rwanda, a Canadian Forces padre asked me how, after all I had seen and experienced, I could believe in God. I answered that I know there is a God because in Rwanda I shook hands with the devil. I have seen him, I have smelled him and I have touched him. I know the devil exists and therefore I know there is a God.”²**
- What is your explanation for all the evil in this world? For the evil in your own heart?
 - The Bible says, **“Stop being so simplistic in how you explain evil. Behind all the sociological, biological, and psychological factors that contribute to the atrocities of the world there is a dark power, a supernatural force, a malicious being who works evil in the world.”**
- Genesis 3 tells us that the devil is the power behind all the destruction that came into the world. He lied to Eve and said God was holding her back by telling her not to eat of a certain fruit. He suggested that she should define truth for herself. And so Adam and Eve rebelled against God and ate the fruit.
 - In that moment paradise was lost. In that moment God's good creation began to unravel. In that moment the dam broke and hell was unleashed on earth.
- Immediately, Adam and Eve felt inner shame. They hid themselves. When God confronted them, Adam blamed his wife and Eve blamed the serpent.
 - The ground was cursed. Childbirth became difficult. Humanity was banished from the garden paradise and from God himself. Pain, suffering, disease, and death entered the world.
 - When we follow the way of the serpent and we become enslaved by him. 1 John 3:7 put it this way, **“He who does what is sinful is of the devil.”** So the fact that we sin proves that we are, in the words of 2 Tim 2:25, **“taken captive by the devil.”**
- At this point in the Bible's big story all seems lost. Human beings are incapable of going back to the way things were.

CHAPTER 3: REDEMPTION THROUGH CHRIST

- Chapter 1: creation. Chapter 2: fall. We are now ready for chapter 3. We can call chapter 3 of the Bible's big story **(SHOW SLIDE 10) Chapter 3: Redemption through Christ**.
 - In the midst of the darkness of Genesis 3 a great beam of light shines through. It is in verse 15. This verse has been called the 'protoevangelium' – the first gospel. In this verse God declares good news. Speaking to the serpent, God says,

² Romeo Dallaire, *Shake Hands With The Devil: The Failure of Humanity In Rwanda* (New York: Carrol & Graf Publishers, 2003), Kindle Edition, Location 134.

- **READ 15** - *I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.*
- God announces that a superhuman male will be born and he will fight a decisive battle with the serpent himself.
 - He will be a man in that he is part of Eve's offspring. But he is superhuman man because has the ability to fight Satan himself. He is *the* superman.
 - In this battle with the serpent the superman will be greatly harmed for the serpent will bite his heel. However, the superman will crush the head of the serpent.
 - So this is the promise of a superman who will be the snake crusher.
- Do you want to know the great part? As Martin Luther said, **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** *“God never told the devil who ‘He’ would be. The devil lived in dread of every woman’s son who was a believer . . . because he never knew who ‘He’ might be.”*
 - It is for this reason that all through history Satan tried to destroy God's people. If there is no birth of a boy then there is no battle. And if there is no battle then he cannot be defeated.
- When Adam and Eve have two sons, it is Abel who follows God. Could Abel be the promised snake crusher? It seems so until his brother Cain murders him. Cain did this and was responsible but behind this was the influence of Satan for Jesus says that the devil was *“a murderer from the beginning.”*
 - God gives Adam and Eve another son named Seth who, like Abel, loves God. Seeing the promise continuing through Seth's line the devil sought to corrupt the line of Seth. He convinced them to intermarry with the line of Cain.
 - It seems to work. The whole earth is corrupted. But one family from Seth's line still serves God. That is Noah. The promise is miraculously preserved through Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- God then narrows the promise even further when he says this snake crusher will come through the line of King David. And so the serpent aims all his rage against David. An evil spirit incites king Saul to throw a spear at David. If David dies it is all over – no superhuman child will be born, no battle will take place, and the serpent will win. But David escapes Saul.
 - The line of David is attacked constantly. There is one fascinating story where the promise of the snake crusher hangs by a thread. Queen Athaliah kills all the king's sons in David's line. No one is left. It seems the promise is dead. Six years pass. Suddenly one of David's sons named Joash appears. As his brothers were being murdered his nurse had hidden him away. But now he is back and the promise is alive.
 - So you see the story keeps moving forward. For thousands of years, God's people looked for this promised snake crusher. Now we are ready to hear the message of Christmas afresh.

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

- Galatians 4 say this: **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** *“when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman.”* This baby is a male and is born of a woman. But this baby is also God's Son. This is a superhuman male. The superman has come to save us. That is exactly what the angels declare: *“Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.”* Here is the long promised “he” of Genesis 3.
 - And why did he come? *“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”*

- The snake crusher has come to undo all the destruction the devil has caused.
 - The snake crusher has come to right all the wrongs.
 - The snake crusher has come to rid the world of evil and renew it for the glory of God and the good of his people.
- In the garden the serpent came to Eve but at the beginning of his ministry Jesus goes after the devil for it was the Holy Spirit who led him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Jesus hunted the serpent and initiated a confrontation.
 - Jesus was picking up where Adam left off but from a more difficult place. Adam faced the serpent among the four rivers of the lush garden but Jesus faced the serpent in the desert.
 - Adam faced the serpent among the fruit trees when he was well fed. Jesus faced the serpent in a place where there was no food and he was hungry.
 - Adam faced the serpent with his wife but Jesus faced the serpent alone.
 - But where Adam was defeated, Jesus was victorious and did not give in to the lies of the serpent.
- And then he began his ministry. Everywhere he went Jesus destroyed the works of the devil.
 - Where evil spirits destroyed people's lives, Jesus cast them out.
 - Where disease destroyed people's bodies, Jesus healed them.
 - Where death destroyed people's families, Jesus raised the dead.
 - Where anger and bitterness destroyed relationships, Jesus called for reconciliation.
 - Where sin destroyed people's relationship with God, Jesus forgave sin.
 - Where the devil's lies deceived the world about who God is and what he is like, Jesus taught the truth for the truth sets us free.
- The serpent could see that he was losing and so he planned to kill Jesus. We read in Luke 22:3, ***"Then Satan entered Judas...And Judas went to the chief priests and the officers of the temple guard and discussed with them how he might betray Jesus."*** He did betray him and Jesus was crucified.
 - The serpent must have shouted with joy. The superman is dead. The promise has failed. The snake is victorious.
 - But like a judo master uses the momentum of his opponent's attack to throw him to the ground, God used evil to defeat evil. On the cross Jesus allowed himself to take the punishment for our sins so that we could be forgiven and set free from the devil.
 - Colossians 2 puts it perfectly: ***(SHOW SLIDE 13) "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."***
- These words ***"disarmed"***, ***"made a public spectacle"*** and ***"triumph"*** recall the days when a Roman general would return from war. To show evidence of his triumph He would drag his enemies through the street, disarmed, naked, and bound in shackles.
 - On the cross Jesus fought on our behalf. He took our sins upon himself. In doing so he disarmed Satan and triumphed over him. Jesus' cry ***"it is finished"*** was not one of defeat. He was not crying out in despair, ***"it is finished. I give up."*** No, it was a shout of victory: ***"IT IS FINISHED!"*** Jesus had been greatly wounded but in that moment he struck the decisive blow against the serpent.
 - The proof that Jesus defeated Satan at the cross is that three days later he burst forth from the grave and ascended to heaven where he was made king over the universe.

CHAPTER 4: RENEWAL OF ALL THINGS

- Creation, Fall, Redemption, and now we must race to the end of the story. **(SHOW SLIDE 14)**

Chapter 4: Renewal of all things.

- The promise is that King Jesus will return. He comes to renew all things. This begins by ridding his universe of all that is evil. He came the first time to defeat the serpent. He will come the second time to utterly crush his head.
 - For as Paul writes, ***“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”*** We read of this day in Revelation 20, which says, ***“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur...[He] will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”***
 - God will then renew the earth that the serpent had sought to destroy. Then heaven, the space where God dwells, will come down to earth and once again God will dwell with his people. Paradise will be restored.
- Do you struggle with all the evil and suffering in the world? The Bible may not tell you all the reasons for why God allowed evil in his universe. However, the Bible’s ultimate answer to the problem of evil is clear: God will destroy it!
 - This is the message of Christmas. The snake crusher has come. He has defeated the serpent and one day he will destroy him.

CONCLUSION

- Have you asked Jesus to forgive your sins and set you free?
 - Call on him today to do this. Say, ***“Jesus, I admit that I have sinned. Please forgive me sins and set me free.”***
- Once you become a Christian you join God in his work to bring renewal to all those areas the devil has brought destruction in the world.
 - This is why we are seeking to raise \$34k to establish a child survival program in Guatemala. The first 28 days of a child’s life are the most vulnerable. Every year, about 2 million of these infants die of preventable causes. The child survival program has been extremely successful. When Heather and I were in Ecuador we saw it in action. They have basically eradicated the infant mortality rate there and the vast majority of the mothers have become Christians.
 - And so we invite you to give throughout the month of December to this project which will effect true renewal in these people’s lives.
- The message of Christmas is not a cozy little bedtime story.
 - It is not just a cute story about a baby being born in a manger.
 - It’s about war. It’s about the solution to all evil and suffering. It is about the renewal of all things.
 - ***“The Son of man came to destroy the works of the devil.”***