



THE NEW SHOFAR

Want a life of Blessing? Repent!

Failure for Christians is always a failure of faithfulness

Lent 1

Biblically we are in the middle of a cosmic battle: Good vs Evil

One thing is clear from the Bible: In His life, death, resurrection and ascension into heaven, Jesus the Christ crushed, destroyed and vanquished forever any powers Satan may have held over us. But as it has been with any war, skirmishes continue until The End. This is where we are as a Church, battling against the fallout from the dying throes of Satan. This struggle will continue but the difference between the present and the past is that now we are now infused with the grace of God's victory in Christ. The only control Satan has over us are in the liberties granted to him by believers.

But does Satan even exist?

There is a simple answer: *Nobody in the Bible talks about hell or Satan more than Jesus.* Therein lies the problem for many modern theologians and believers. To ignore Satan as a reality, or to write him off as a "myth" representing human evil, or an abstract idea of evil is to go against an enormous amount of biblical teaching. What the Bible does teach is that Satan was originally created good by God but chose to oppose the Almighty, rejecting Heaven because of the fear of being considered less than this new human creation so loved by the Creator God. Therefore, Paul tells us that *we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

Evil in the Bible

Biblical evil is associated with *unfaithfulness, immorality* and the *breaking of covenant*. It begins in the human heart, meaning we bring evil down upon itself. It works away against us as a power against life and this is where our understanding of Satan comes into play. He is the evil one, the tempter, the enemy, the father of lies and more (all New Testament "titles"). But his powers are limited. He can only work away against our weaknesses, play up to our human vulnerabilities as he did with Adam and Eve. Sin only happens when we allow hubris, arrogance and selfishness to control our hearts and our deeds. So opposed to God are the works of Satan that the evil one will do anything to drag down the beloved creatures of God into the pit alongside himself in suffering, to alienate us from an eternal life in God.

There are powers in the world striving to impede the movement of history towards the Kingdom. This opposition will continue to grow in intensity until the End is upon us. This is why our Hope remains in Christ, in His absolute victory over Satan through His death on the cross. It offers us the guarantee of being able to defeat all of the efforts of the Evil One.

Produced by Bishop Michael Hough for the Disciples of Christ -

anathoth.hough@gmail.com - www.houghgod.com

In the breath of God we become truly human

What makes us alive is the breath of God within us. Life is a participation in the very life of God at work in creation. Fullness of humanity and fullness of life exist only through our existence in God. When God is marginalised or dismissed in the world, evil thrives, for we were not created to exist apart from God and the divine graces sustaining our lives.

It is in the story of Adam and Eve that we understand the beginning of sin. God said of the fruit *you must not touch it, or you will die*. No ambiguity there. Satan said *you most certainly will not die*. Therein lies the reality of sin. God says one thing and we do something different.

This is the origin of sin: *hubris* which is really a flaw in our personality. As a result of this hubris we overestimate our capabilities to such an extent that we lose contact with reality. It is this hubris that drives us to cross normal human limits, and violate moral codes. Those codes might be alright for others but not for us! That is hubris. We become whoever or whatever we decide is best for us regardless of all else. It is more than pride for hubris defines us in terms of the self rather than in terms of God, others and all biblical expectations and demands. As with Adam and Eve – God may say something and it may be good advice but ultimately, we have to decide for ourselves the true nature of right and wrong. God's law is *advisory only*.

Only in Jesus can Evil be overcome and divine order restored

As Jesus sets out on his ministry, in response to His commissioning by His Father, He asserts the two fundamental forces that are driving Him. *Firstly*, He remains obedient to His Father in all things. Even before He worries about His own needs, ambitions and preferences, He carries out the will of God. *Secondly*, He lives as the Servant of God. It is this serving of God that defines who He is as Son. These two elements are what enables Him to command Satan to *go away from me!* He lives in God and God lives in Him.

Importantly for us, those who imitate Jesus in this way of living are also guaranteed victory over the forces of evil and darkness. This is why Jesus went down into the river Jordan to be baptized by John. He was declaring His solidarity with us. Now we see what that solidarity guarantees: evil, darkness, sin, despair, doubt, weakness and even death itself can never, *never* be victorious over us. This is not because baptism makes us so good and so powerful but because it is the Jesus within us, the Jesus with whom we are aligned who is victorious through us. As Jesus defeated Satan, so too, the Jesus in whom we live and move and have our being is defeating the Evil One in our world. This victory is what comes about as we live in obedience to God. In a world where hubris is celebrated and rewarded, this message of humble service and obedience will always be counter cultural.

In this new era, this new creation that is built around the Risen Christ, reality is now different. Life in the Kingdom of God is a life made possible in and through Jesus. Our calling is not to be perfect in terms of obeying the laws but perfect through being one with Christ Jesus. Christian success; church works of growth, renewal and evangelism have their success guaranteed through this life of service and obedience.

Lent 2020 becomes then a journey back to a pursuit of perfection in Christ. The more our lives are shaped by Christ the more fully human and fully alive we become.

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