

## ***Jesus, the Promised Serpent-Slayer***

**Gen. 3:15**

This is the first week of Advent, so through the end of the year, we will be taking a short break from our series through Galatians and focusing on the birth of Christ as we always do at Christmas time. But this year we will be giving attention to some ways in which the coming of Jesus was foreshadowed in the Old Testament through prophecies, types, and images.

And this is important because it reminds us that the coming of Jesus was not a last-ditch effort by God to save mankind, it wasn't as if God had exhausted all other options and sending his Son was the nuclear option when all else failed, the coming of Christ to redeem his people from the slavery of sin and death was always the plan, and by God's grace, he gave us images or shadows of the coming Messiah throughout the Old Testament.

So, this morning, with the advent theme of hope we will see that there was hope for God's people from the very beginning, even immediately after the fall of mankind.

Let me invite you to take your copy of God's word and turn to Genesis chapter 3.

As you find your way there, I want you to consider for a moment that throughout history literature and film have been filled with stories of heroes that save the day by slaying some kind of snake-like creature, oftentimes a dragon. Can you think of any off the top of your head?

One example in Christian literature is *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. In it, if you've never read it, Bunyan tells the allegorical tale of Christian who makes his journey to the Celestial City, and on his journey meets all kinds of characters as a means of depicting various experiences of the Christian life. And at one point in the story, Christian battles a character named Apollyon, who is the prince of the City of Destruction. Bunyan describes Apollyon, writing, "Now the monster was hideous to behold. He was clothed with scales like a fish, and they are his pride. He had wings like a dragon, and feet like a bear, and out of his belly came fire and smoke."<sup>1</sup>

Another example, one non-Christian example, is *Harry Potter*. Maybe you've heard it before. That series is filled with snake imagery. Just to give a few examples: one of the houses at Hogwarts—the one where all the bad guys come from—is named *Slytherin* and has a snake as its symbol. The main villain, Voldemort, has a snake as his loyal

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<sup>1</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Chicago: Moody, ), 63.

sidekick. There is a special snake language that some possess so they can speak with snakes. And there are more examples from that series.

Even less popular stories tell this same tale in some way. My youngest daughter has a children's book (not a Christian book) called *Unicorns are the Worst*. It tells the story of a troll that complains page after page about his unicorn neighbors, and all the ways they are the worst, until one day he is attacked by a dragon, and the unicorns come to his defense and defeat the dragon. The book ends with the troll at a tea party with the unicorns saying, "dragons are the worst."

There are countless more stories in popular literature that describe some kind of hero, or heroes, that face the serpent or dragon in order to save the damsel in distress. And the reason for that is because those epic stories echo the greatest story, the story of redemption.<sup>2</sup> The story of the gospel. And we will see this clearly this morning, again, beginning in Genesis chapter 3.

#### THE FALL OF MAN CALLS FOR A HERO - GENESIS 3:1-15

Now, we know the context of Genesis 3. In chapters one and two, we read about the creation account, when God creates the heavens and the earth and everything that fills them. He creates the first humans, Adam and Eve, and places them in the Garden of Eden to tend it and be fruitful. God gives them some very wide boundaries in which they are to live under his good rule and reign. Really, the only boundary God gives them is to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But then things go terribly wrong. We read in the first verse of chapter 3...

#### **Genesis 3:1**

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

So, we have Adam and Eve in the Garden under the reign of God, and then we are introduced to another character in the story, who is only identified here as "the serpent." And the text does not say who this serpent is specifically, but we do know from other places in the Bible, that the serpent is Satan.<sup>3</sup>

The Bible describes Satan as the great enemy of God and his people. As a created being, he rebelled against God and is fallen. He doesn't work alone and leads a pack of

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<sup>2</sup> For more on this idea, see the Introduction to *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer* by Andrew David Naselli (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Revelation 20:1-2, for example.

fallen angels we know as demons. The Bible describes Satan in many different ways such as tempter, enemy, evil one, murderer, sinner, deceiver, and father of lies.<sup>4</sup>

And we see him live up to those last two descriptions well here in Genesis 3. Satan tempts Eve to do what God told them not to do, to eat the fruit, and he tempts them by questioning both God's words and God's motives for them. "Surely God didn't really say that." "God must not want the best for you, he must not care about you."

Adam and Eve give in to the temptation and eat, they sin, and from then on sin entered into the world and humanity.

The story continues as God confronts them and pronounces judgment in the form of curses on them, the first part of the curse on the serpent, Satan, in verse 14. And in reality, the Bible really could have ended right there in Genesis 3:14. God did tell Adam and Eve that if they ate the fruit they would die. So, they can't say he didn't warn them. Again, the Bible could easily have ended right there.

But...by God's grace, we have verse 15...

**Genesis 3:15**

**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."

It's an amazing promise, and we shouldn't miss this. In the midst of pronouncing curses, God still brings a promise of future redemption. Notice, even *before* God pronounces judgment on the man and the woman—a judgment they deserve—he offers hope. And this verse has everything to do with Christmas.

The 18th-century preacher, George Whitefield, once preached a sermon on Genesis 3:15 and he told his audience, "On reading to you these words, I may address you in the language of the holy angels to the shepherds, that were watching their flocks by night: 'Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy.'"<sup>5</sup>

Why? Because what God said to them there is that a Redeemer would one day be born and would defeat the serpent and make all things right again. Theologians have labeled this verse the "protoevangelium" or the "first gospel." This is the first time in the entire Bible that the gospel is presented. Not fully of course, but it is there.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on a theology of Satan, see chapter 4 of Graham Cole, *Against the Darkness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> George Whitefield on Genesis 3:15, "The Seed of the Woman, and the Seed of the Serpent"

Calvin said that in Gen. 3:15 “a few slender sparks beamed forth: additions being afterward made, a greater degree of light began to be displayed, and continued gradually to increase and shine with greater brightness, until at length, all the clouds being dispersed, Christ the Sun of Righteousness arose, and with full refulgence illumined all the earth.”<sup>6</sup>

In other words, it’s like slightly pulling back the curtain in the morning, letting just a single ray of sunshine pierce the dark room.

Or you can think of Genesis 3:15 as the acorn of the Bible, that sprouts up into the fullness of an oak tree that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is here that the initial promise is made that God would redeem us. So, this is a very, very important verse in the opening pages of Scripture that set the stage for everything God would do afterward.

So, let’s just look at it in a little more detail.

**Genesis 3:15**

**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.”

Again, God says that he has put “enmity” between the serpent and the woman. “Enmity” is not a word we use a ton today, but it carries with it this idea of hostility or a posture of animosity. It’s used in other places in the Old Testament to describe nations that are at war with one another (Ezekiel 25:15, 35:5). It’s used to describe the kind of hatred that results in murder (Num. 35:21). The point is that when God says there will be enmity, he is foretelling of a life-and-death struggle.

And he says that this enmity, this hostility will be between Satan and Eve and, ultimately between Satan’s offspring and Eve’s offspring. So, the question is who is the offspring? Who is God talking about here?

Offspring here represents *both* a corporate identity as well as an individual identity. Here’s what I mean by that.

The Bible presents humanity as divided into two groups of people: the redeemed and the non-redeemed, or the saved and the lost. Those who have God as their Father and those who have Satan as theirs.

Jesus uses this kind of language in John 8...

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<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.10.20.

**John 8:42-44, 47**

**42** Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. **43** Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. **44** You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies...**47** Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God."

Again, two groups of people throughout history, those that belong to God and those who are associated with Satan. And, naturally, there is an enmity between the two.

But there is an individual identity being referred to in this promise as well. The word offspring in this translation can also be translated as "seed." And this theme of "seed" runs throughout the Bible, especially here in Genesis, and while it is often used to describe a people, it is also used to describe an individual. So, God makes promises to Abraham and his "seed" or "offspring" for example, a promise to a corporate body of people. But we learn later in the New Testament that the true "seed" or true "offspring" is Jesus.

This is what Paul means in Galatians 3:16...

**Galatians 3:16**

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ.

So, all of that to say, when God pronounces this curse on Satan, he is referring both to a battle between the people of God and Satan, AND, most importantly, between Satan and Jesus, the true seed of the woman.

This is clearer when God explains that in that battle, the offspring of the woman would bruise Satan's head while Satan would bruise Jesus' heel. "Bruise" can also be translated as "crush," but the main emphasis is on the words "head" and "heel." We know that a head injury is far worse than a heel injury.

The idea is that someone would come and while Satan will cause him to suffer, he would ultimately kill Satan.

The main point is that the Redeemer, Jesus, though he will suffer in his arrest and crucifixion, will deliver a fatal blow to our great enemies: Satan, sin, and death.

## **LESSONS FROM THE “FIRST GOSPEL”**

Now, this is an incredible promise at the very beginning of the Bible and it tells us a ton about God, his work, our future, and more. Let me give you three lessons that I don't want us to miss from the first gospel of the Bible, Genesis 3:15.

### **1. The Church has an enemy, but not a conqueror.**

Throughout history, the people of God have faced hostility. We have faced persecution, physical violence, and even death. And this stems from the fall. Again, there is enmity between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of Satan, led by Satan himself. Revelation 12 describes Satan as a dragon who makes war with the woman's children.

So, as the people of God, we should not be surprised by the hostility we face as we seek to follow Jesus. It is a reality that we should all expect and be prepared to endure. But as we do that, we ought to recognize who our true enemy is in Satan. So, as Peter warns us, be alert because Satan is on the prowl looking to devour. He is real and he is hungry.

Live with eyes wide open to the reality that you have a true enemy **HOWEVER**, he is not your conqueror. He has been crushed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and because of our repentant faith in Christ, we share in that victory.

This is what Jesus meant when saying to Peter in Matthew 16:18...

#### **Matthew 16:18**

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

It is this truth that enables Paul to say to the Roman believers in Romans 8...

#### **Romans 8:37-39**

**37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.  
**38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

And then, at the end of his letter, he gives probably my favorite benediction in all of the Bible...

**Romans 16:20**

The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

How will Satan be crushed under our feet? Because we are in Christ, we are so united to him that his victory is our victory. His death is our death. And his resurrection is our resurrection.

Do you feel defeated? Do you feel conquered by your sin? Do you sense your enemy gloating over you this morning?

Spurgeon - "...let us resist the devil always with this belief, that he has received a broken head...Let us do this bravely, and tell him to his teeth that we are not afraid of him. Tell him to recollect his bruised head...We know him, and see the deadly wound he bears. His power is gone; he is fighting a lost battle; he is contending against omnipotence. He has set himself against the oath of the Father; against the blood of the incarnate Son; against the eternal power and Godhead of the blessed Spirit, all of which are engaged in the defence of the seed of the woman in the day of battle. Therefore, brethren, be ye steadfast in resisting the evil one, being strong in faith, giving glory to God."<sup>7</sup>

Again, the Church has an enemy, but not a conqueror.

**2. The end is not a mystery, so our hope is not a fantasy.**

The ultimate end of history, of our story, is not a cliffhanger. We aren't anxiously waiting for the last page to be turned to find out what will happen. Though not all of the details were presented there, the end was known from the beginning. Satan, and his minions, will be defeated by God's promised Redeemer.

And so, you can look to the future with confidence, because the Christian life is one in which you can joyfully and boldly walk with the assurance of victory rather than the prospect of defeat.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Charles Spurgeon, "Christ the Conqueror of Satan." Sermon preached November 26, 1876.

<sup>8</sup> Derek Thomas, "The Significance of Genesis 3:15"  
<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/significance-genesis-315>.

Never think that hope for the Christian is walking through life with fingers crossed or merely wishing upon a star. There is no need for you to be superstitious—or even a little stitious.

The end has been settled. Jesus has won. And we as his people live out of our shared victory today because we know that victory will be truly realized one day soon. Jesus will one day soon finish crushing the head of Satan into the dust for good.

Again, the end is not a mystery, so our hope is not a fantasy.

### **3. The Gospel is the antidote to the Serpent's poison.**

Another picture of this is found in the book Numbers. In Numbers 21 we read about this time when the nation of Israel complained against God, rebelled against him in their attitudes and words, and so God brings judgment on them. And he does so by sending venomous snakes to bite them. But God tells Moses to fashion a serpent and set it on a pole, to lift it up, and if people who are bitten by a snake look to it, they will be healed.

This is a picture of what Jesus has done for us in his death on the cross. In fact, Jesus refers to this scene in John 3...

#### **John 3:14-15**

**14** And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15** that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

Jesus, in taking on flesh, being born of a woman, going to the cross takes the bite from the serpent for us, all so that we don't have to. In the life-and-death battle between Satan and us, Jesus, by associating with humanity, took our side and fought for us. And now, for anyone who looks to him in repentance and faith, they will be healed.

So, when you feel the stinging bites of the serpent at your heels, when you are tempted to believe his lies, tempted to believe and own the condemnation that he whispers into your ear, tempted to be swallowed up by fear, tempted to be overwhelmed by the prospect of death, when Satan bites, put on the gospel that has crushed his head.

Ambrose, the 4th-century church father once wrote, "Let us put on sandals of the gospel that shut out the serpent's poison and blunt his bites that we may be provided with covering on our feet by the gospel."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ambrose, *Flight from the World*, 7.43. Quoted in Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament vol. 1, Gen. 3:15.



If you've never trusted in Christ, you need to feel the bite of the serpent on your soul today. And though it is a death blow, the good news is that if you look to Christ this morning in faith and repentance, you will find healing and life.

## **CONFESSION**

But, for those of us who are Christians, we don't always walk in confidence, do we? We don't always live life with hope. And when we find that we lack hope, we find a lack of belief at the root. We don't believe, or we have forgotten, that Jesus has overcome Satan, overcome death, overcome sin, and he has graciously swept us up in his arms this side of the battle.

So, let's spend a minute or two confessing our lack of belief, our fear, and ask the Lord to give us the confidence to walk with hope until he returns.

## **PRAYER**

### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

#### **Colossians 2:13-15**

**13** And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, **14** by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. **15** He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Again, Jesus has defeated the enemy, therefore we can sing with hope this morning as a church. So, let's stand and continue in worship of our serpent-slaying Savior.

## **VERSES**

Genesis 3:1

Genesis 3:15

Genesis 3:15

John 8:42-44, 47

Galatians 3:16

Matthew 16:18

Romans 8:37-39

Romans 16:20

John 3:14-15

Colossians 2:13-15

### **SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What other stories in literature or film can you think of that depict the hero slaying some kind of serpent-like creature?
2. Would you say that you are a hopeful person? Why or why not?
3. How does the truth that “the Church has an enemy but not a conqueror” encourage this week?
4. As Christians who believe in the Bible, we know that in the end, Jesus wins. Why are we still tempted to live in fear and anxiety?
5. In what way are you battling fear right now? How might the gospel calm your fears?