



gracefellowship

Series: Rescue+Mission
Date: December 3, 2023

Title: Enemy in the Garden
Passage: Genesis 3

Advent Reading: Hope

When we think of Christmas we envision the story of angels singing on the night Jesus was born. We think about a sweet baby placed in a stone manger- a feeding trough for animals. We sing songs like Silent Night and in our mind's eye the whole scene is so peaceful and serene. But here's the truth:

**The birth of Jesus was a war-time strategy!
God sent Jesus to earth on a rescue mission.**

Maybe you've seen the movies like Private Ryan or Black Hawk Down or Lone Survivor where extraordinary measures were taken to rescue people during a war. The different for them and many of us as disciples of Jesus is that they knew they were in a war and we are largely ignorant of the fact or we turn a blind eye to the reality of the spiritual war we are in. And I have to be honest with you, I prefer to talk about our faith from a perspective of love and grace and mercy and hope and peace, but the Bible frequently uses war-like language to describe the reality of our faith.

This morning we are beginning a new teaching series that will look at Christmas in a much different way than you may have looked at it in the past. I realize that it is a departure from tradition to skip over stories like the shepherds keeping watch over their sheep in the fields at night and the Magi visiting from the East bringing gifts to the newborn King. But spiritual warfare is a reality we need to understand and be prepared for as Christians.

Here's the first thing for us to recognize:

We have an adversary, or enemy, who wants to destroy us.

It's important to figure this out or we make the mistake of wrongly identifying someone as an enemy.

:: Ephesians 6:10-12

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 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.

Our enemy is the devil, or Satan. Our enemy is not flesh and blood. We need to realize that whomever it is we have deemed an enemy is really a captive in need of rescue. There are people we sometimes call enemies who are really just deceived by our true enemy. Paul tells us in Ephesians that the devil has many schemes, which he uses to deceive people in order to entice them away from God.

This is a war that has been going on for thousands of years, played out in the spiritual realm as well as the physical realm. For us to understand why we celebrate Christmas we have to go back to the Garden of Eden. When we read the account of creation we find that everything God created was good. He made a good world, filled with good things. And the pinnacle moment of creation is when God makes mankind and breathes life into dirt. He puts man in a special garden He created and when God looks at all He has made He declares that it is very good!

Every day, in the cool of the day, God would come to walk with Adam and Eve. They had access to God in all His glory- no separation- they saw Him just as He is and enjoyed unfiltered relationship with the One who created them. We aren't told how long they enjoyed the paradise God created and their daily walks with God, but we are told that one day a serpent steps into the story and the one word we are told to describe the serpent's character is he is *crafty*.

:: Genesis 3:1-7

1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,

3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman.

5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

Interestingly enough we aren't told the back story of the serpent, we aren't told what or who he is, we just know that God has an adversary who is intent on destroying His work. As the Bible goes on we are going to get more details about who this serpent is.

- In Job, he is an adversary of righteousness.
- In John's gospel Jesus calls Satan a murderer and a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44) Jesus also calls him a thief who comes to steal, kill and destroy. (John 10:10)
- Peter describes Satan as our enemy who is a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

Because you are a creation of God and carry His image, you are a target of Satan!

Satan cannot defeat God, so he looks to destroy the work of God. When we go back to the story of Adam and Eve in the garden we find the first strategy Satan uses in this war against God and His prized creation: Deception.

Satan's first weapon against humanity is deception.

One of the things Satan loves to do most is he twists and distorts the Word of God. That's what he did with Eve. Satan confronts Eve with God's Words.

:: Genesis 3:1-5

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Satan's deception comes through misrepresenting what God said. He led Eve to believe that God was withholding something good from her, which says that God is not good. After all, how could a good God keep something from you?

When God comes to walk with them in the garden that evening, Adam and Eve have hidden because they recognized their rebellion and found their nakedness and this new-found knowledge not to be good, but to be cause for shame and guilt. When God asks what happened, Eve says, “The serpent deceived me.” She recognizes immediately that what Satan said was not truth- Satan is the father of lies- he cannot speak truth, rather it was deception.

Satan didn’t have to get Eve to doubt the existence of God- Eve had seen God and walked with Him. Satan just had to get Eve to doubt the goodness of God and convince her she couldn’t trust Him.

These are two of the tactics Satan still uses today to keep people from faith in God:

1. Convince them God doesn’t exist
2. Convince them God is not good.

A.W. Tozer wrote this in his book, *The Apostles’ Creed*:

“Man fell when he lost his right concept of God.”

- **A.W. Tozer**

Satan fights to keep you from seeing the surpassing glory of God. He wants to keep you focused on counterfeit gods.

:: 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Again, this is why we say our battle is not against flesh and blood- those are people who have their minds blinded to the truth and reality of God’s love and goodness. As followers of Jesus Paul warns us to be careful about the things we believe.

:: Colossians 2:8

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

There are three things we need to do in order to avoid having our minds blinded:

1. **Know God’s Word faithfully.**
2. **Know Jesus intimately.**
3. **Listen to the Holy Spirit whole-heartedly.**

How is Christmas a part of this story?

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God the expectation was they would immediately die. But instead, God showed grace. Death would be a reality for them, but it would be postponed. Not only that, God made coverings for Adam and Eve to hide their nakedness, which would be a constant reminder of their guilt and shame. Not only that, God made a promise that someone would come as a rescuer for all mankind!

:: Genesis 3:14-15

14 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. 15 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.”

God’s solution to our sin was announced in the Garden of Eden. One day a champion would come who would crush the head of the serpent, but in that act, the serpent would strike his heel. That’s the stories of Christmas and Easter in one sentence!

At the fall of man, when Satan thought he defeated God, ruining His creation, God introduced hope in the promise of a Savior.

Let’s be really clear about something: Satan is an adversary of God. And, for reasons beyond our understanding, God allows Satan to operate. But they are not equals! God is the creator and Satan is a creation. Think about it- when God decided it was time to introduce His champion, the Savior of mankind, He sent a baby! And Satan couldn’t do anything about it!

Satan is fighting a losing battle. But he is still fighting. So here’s what we need to know:

You are in a spiritual war. There is a battle in unseen realms for your eternal soul. God fights for you because He loves you and desperately wants to restore fellowship with you.

Satan fights over you because he hates God and uses you as a pawn in his war. He will tell you that a rejection of God will lead you to greater freedom, but in the end it leads to death. He wants to deceive and he laughs you all along the way as you eat the fruit of his deception.

It seems weird to use the Christmas season to talk about spiritual war, but as you read the Bible you’re going to see this militant language used over and over again. In fact, when John talks about the reason for Christmas, he says this:

:: 1 John 3:8b

...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.

Christmas was an invasion. At the birth of Jesus the final declaration of war was announced. At the cross the victory was won. Now we await the day Jesus will return and the work of the devil will finally be destroyed.

During this Christmas season I hope that you recognize the God who fights on your behalf and that you learn to recognize and reject Satan's deceptions as you gaze on the beauty of Jesus and see His truth.