



"The Great Pretender"

June 7, 2009

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“Don’t look at the man behind the curtain!”

Do you remember that frantic line from the 1939 Hollywood classic, *The Wizard of Oz*? A tornado deposits little Dorothy somewhere over the rainbow in the magical kingdom of Oz. Yet Dorothy desperately wants to get back to the farm in Kansas because, as she reminds everyone, “There’s no place like home.”

She is told that at the far end of the Yellow Brick Road is the great Wizard of Oz. He alone has the power to grant her wishes. So it’s off to see the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz.

Along the way she is joined by the Cowardly Lion who is desperate to find courage, the Tin Man who longs for a heart, and the Scarecrow who would give anything for a brain. The Yellow Brick Road takes this band of hopeful misfits on a frightening journey as they barely escape one attack after another launched by the Wicked Witch of the West. Overcoming all odds, they finally arrive at the inner sanctum of the Wizard of Oz.

Standing ominously before them is a gigantic and terrifying steel contraption with lights flashing, bells ringing, smoke belching, and gears whirling. A dark and thunderous voice bellows out from this terrifying machine, filling them with dread.

The Cowardly Lion shakes uncontrollably, the Scarecrow is reduced to stuttering, and the Tin Man loses whatever heart he doesn’t possess. Only little Dorothy is able to stammer out their requests. But the unseen Wizard of Oz belligerently bellows out of the terrifying contraption, berating them for even daring to think that they could come into his august presence.

As Dorothy and her trio of misfit friends begin to whimper in defeat, her little dog Toto gingerly walks behind the belching machine, pulls back the curtain, and exposes the truth. Hidden behind the contraption is a roly-poly little man speaking into a megaphone while frantically pulling the rows of levers that operate the bells and whistles of his machine. It is all a gigantic hoax, designed to create an illusion of omnipotent power while terrifying the faint-hearted into submission.

Realizing that his fraud has been exposed, the little man frantically pleads, “Don’t look behind the curtain. Don’t look behind the curtain.”

The devil doesn’t want you to look behind the curtain either. You might discover that he is not as terrifying as you first thought.

Satan is the master of the masquerade; the fallen angel with a thousand faces. He can wear the demonic mask to terrify us or come as the Angel of Light to seduce us with his beauty. He can roar like a lion or stalk us like a

dragon. He is the ancient serpent who tempts us with forbidden pleasures only to become the accuser who condemns us after we have taken his bait. He is the "lord of the flies" who commands invisible swarms of demons and the puppet master who manipulates the forces of darkness in this world. Scripture calls him the god of this age, the father of lies, the prince of darkness, and the spirit who works in the children of disobedience.

Like Dorothy and her friends, we might stand quivering before the fire and smoke that belches forth from this Wizard of Hell. But the Holy Spirit has pulled back the curtain and exposed the truth: the lion is wounded; the dragon is defeated; the Angel of Light is exposed as the Prince of Darkness; and Lucifer has fallen from his heights. Martin Luther had it right in his great Reformation hymn: "Though his power and craft are great...his doom is sure." He operates with smoke and mirrors, hidden behind the curtain while pulling levers of illusionary power.

Today we are going to look behind the curtain and unmask the Enemy of our souls. In St. Paul's training manual on spiritual warfare, we learn our third principle for getting battle ready:

If you want to win the war, you had better know your enemy.

In his classic book, *The Art of War*, the ancient Chinese strategist, Sun Tzu wrote, "The first rule of war is to know your enemy." We must pull the curtain back and study the person and strategies of Satan. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:11, "...stand against the devil's schemes." In 2 Corinthians 2:11 he writes of Satan, "We are not unaware of his schemes."

If we want to be battle ready, we must possess a proper estimation of the devil's power. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis issues this warning:

"There are two opposite and equal errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors."

Mark Twain understood the balance when he wrote, "We may not pay Satan undue reverence, but we must at least respect his talent." When we pull back the curtain, this is what we see:

1. Satan is alive and well on planet earth.

Paul is crystal-clear: Satan exists! Ephesians 6:11 says, "...take your stand against the devil's schemes." Ephesians 6:12 adds, "...we struggle against...forces in heavenly realms." Our Lord Jesus believed in Satan. He repeatedly faced him. No one ever talked more about the devil than did Jesus. Satan appears in the opening lines of Genesis and won't go away until

the final page of the Bible. The devil is central to the gospel story. Deny his reality and the message of Christianity is gutted. Ignore him to your peril.

Five years ago a *New York Times* poll asked Americans if Satan was a "living being" or "a symbol of evil." Sixty-two percent said he was only a symbol. In short, more than 150 million Americans believe that Satan has no influence in this world. Pollster George Barna claims that less than 65 percent of professing Christians in America believe in a *real* devil.

The French poet Pierre Baudelaire wrote, "It is the greatest art of the devil to convince us that he does not exist." It allows him to sneak under the radar undetected. When we turn him into a cartoon character, or dismiss him as a religious superstition, he has already won the battle. But you cannot pretend he doesn't exist, or that the battle is not raging about you. C.S. Lewis wrote, "There is no neutral ground in the universe. Every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan." If we are going to be battle ready we must believe that Satan really does exist, and that he poses a real and present danger to us.

2. In Satan's biography we find keys to spiritual battles.

This is a principle of military reconaissance: if you want to anticipate how your enemies will fight their battles, you need to understand the experiences of their lives that shape the way they think. To get inside Satan's head you have to go to his beginnings as documented in Ezekiel 28 & Isaiah 14.

1) Lucifer the glorious angel

Isaiah 14:12 cries, "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!" The Hebrew for "son of the dawn" is "*heleye, ben shachar.*" The word *shachar* was later changed to Lucifer. *Shachar* literally means *the bringer of light*, a title that was often given to worship leaders in ancient Israel. Could it be that Lucifer was the worship leader of heaven? If so, he was the most important angel of all. Listen to the words of Ezekiel 28:12ff:

"You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty...every precious stone adorned you...Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared...You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones. You were blameless in all your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you."

No angel was more beautiful than Lucifer. He was the model of perfection. Was he called "the light bringer" because he was the one who, at God's command, brought the first light into the darkness of the uncreated universe? But Ezekiel 28:15 adds, "You were blameless in all your ways *until* wickedness was found in you." Wrapped in the glory of the "light bringer"

is the demon seed of pride. When does this secret pride burst forth into naked rebellion? Ezekiel and Isaiah give an insight that may shock you.

2) The Genesis of Lucifer's jealousy

The common assumption is that Lucifer rebelled against God *before* the creation of the world, was hurled to earth, and *then* went after Adam and Eve to destroy them. But Ezekiel 28:13 says, "You were in Eden, the garden of God." Verse 14 adds, "You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you." Lucifer was ordained (or set apart) by God for a task in the Garden of Eden. What was that job? Ezekiel says he was a *guardian angel*. He was appointed to guard Adam and Eve: the greatest of God's archangels called to protect the crown jewel of God's creation! Verse 14 says that, at that point, he still walked on "the holy mount" (in other words *heaven*) and walked among "the fiery stones" (the *Seraphim* or *fire angels*). He was still, according to verse 14, blameless in all his ways.

Think about what happened in the Garden. Until this moment, the angels were the apex of God's creation and Lucifer was the loftiest of them all. Then God created a man and a woman. Psalm 8:5 says that God made them "a little lower than the angels." As they rose up out of the dust of the earth, these new creatures must have been singularly unimpressive to their guardian angel, Lucifer. They were made from the mud of the earth; he was made from the fires of heaven. He flew on wings through the heavens while they crawled on the earth from which they were formed.

But these mud people had something Lucifer could never possess. God breathed his very essence into them. They bore his image. He walked in easy intimacy with them in the Garden, calling them his children. As "the light bringer" watched, jealousy and pride began to rise up within him. Imagine his humiliation: the worship leader of heaven, the one who brought light into the universe, and the highest of all angels called to be "a ministering spirit" to these clay creatures! Verse 16 says of Lucifer, "You were filled with violence." In his rage, he decided to destroy the crown jewels of God's creation and rebel against the King of the universe.

3) Pride leads to a great fall

Verse 17 plots his revenge: "Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor." Isaiah 14:13&14 describes the great rebellion:

"You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'"

Lucifer's plan was to ascend above all the angels in heaven and sit on God's throne. The third chapter of Genesis reveals his scheme. The "light bringer" violated his trust as the protector of Adam and Eve, took on the form of a serpent, and seduced Adam and Eve into disobeying against God. At that moment the great rebellion that began on earth spread to heaven. Revelation 12 tells us that a third of the angels in heaven joined Lucifer and war erupted in heaven. Creation fell into sin, chaos, and death.

4) O how the mighty have fallen

Isaiah 14:11&12 tells of Lucifer's fate: "All your pomp has been brought down to the grave...How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to earth." Ezekiel 28:16 adds, "I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub from among the fiery stones." Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, wrote this in his lesser known book, *The History of the Devil*:

"Satan has been banished to be a wanderer, without fixed abode, place or space allowed for him to rest the soles of his feet. He inhabits the vast wasteland of liquid air, and will someday be cast into a bottomless pit. He has no home, has no future. His hell is to wander in insatiable loneliness and rage."

The "bringer of light" is now doomed to wander in darkness. Lucifer is a wounded lion, and his ultimate doom is sure, but he cannot forget or forgive his humiliation. You see Lucifer's spirit at work in all human pride, discontent, rebellion, violence, jealousy, rage, deception, and striving to rise to the highest places. At the Cross Jesus crushed his head. He is fatally wounded and his ultimate doom is sure. But a wounded beast is most dangerous. That's why 1 Peter 5:8 says, "Be self-controlled and alert, for your adversary, the devil goes about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." But 1 Peter 5:9 goes on to say, "Resist him..." He failed to stop Christ, and he cannot defeat us. William Cowper said it best: "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint on his knees."

3. Respect Satan's power, but remember his limitations.

We may be creatures of clay, but we possess more power than the greatest archangel created from heaven's fire. The half-brother of Jesus wrote in James 4:7, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Satan is no match for the weakest Christian who will dare resist him. Here are some facts:

1) Satan is not self-existent.

God has always been. He is the great *I AM*. He was and is and is to come, with no beginning and no end. He is the Creator of all things. Satan is a

created being. Ezekiel 28:15 says that he had a beginning. Revelation 20:12 says he will meet his end in the Lake of Fire. As a mere creature he is finite.

2) Satan is not sovereign

He has no ultimate power. He cannot do whatever he wants. He may be a roaring lion, but he's on a leash. In the story of Job we learn that he can do nothing without God's permission. Even then, God sets his boundaries. And every evil he does will ultimately accomplish the purposes of God.

3) Satan is not all-powerful.

1 John 4:4 says to every believer, "Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world." Christ is greater than Satan. If we resist he will flee. When we pray he trembles. If we speak the Word of God, the demons must submit to us. We never have to fear or back down from him.

4) Satan is not all-knowing.

In Job 1:8 we discover that he didn't even know that Job existed until God pointed him out. Satan is wily and clever. He knows human nature. He is a master manipulator. But he cannot read our minds. He has not figured out how to outwit the Word of God or stand in the face of prayer. We demolish his arguments with the simple gospel. His wisdom cannot even stand up to the childlike faith of the simplest believer.

5) Satan is not ever-present.

He gets far too much credit. People are always saying, "Satan did this" or "The devil did that" as if he could be everywhere at once. Granted, he has demons to do his work and a myriad of forces of evil to do his bidding. But he can only be in one place at one time. Like a lion, he is always roaming around. His spirit may be everywhere at work in the children of disobedience, but he is only in one place at this very moment. Let's not give him too much reverence or credit. Like the Wizard of Oz, his appearance is much more frightening than his actual power.

4. Claim your authority and ultimate victory.

Before he left this earth, Jesus told his disciples in Matthew 28:18 that he has *all* authority in heaven and earth. Then he made this amazing promise: "I give you all authority in my name." This is critical for spiritual warfare when we remember the words of his disciples in Luke 10:17: "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

What authority do we possess over the devil and his demons? The Scriptures are power-packed with promises. **We have the ability to see**

through his schemes. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 2:11, "We are not unaware of his schemes." We don't ever have to be caught by surprise or deceived. Not only that, **we never have to be defeated by his schemes.** St. Paul repeats it in Ephesians 6:11-14: "Stand...stand...stand...stand." All around us are the rusted hulks of lives shipwrecked by sin and stupidity. None of those people had to fall. If only they would have read the Scriptures and lived out their precepts, they would have escaped his traps. Jesus said, "Know the truth, and it will set you free." God says in Hosea 4:6, "My people are destroyed for the lack of knowledge."

We have the study to send Satan packing. The half-brother of Jesus says in James 4:7, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We never have the right to say, "The devil made me do it." Jesus is even more extravagant than St. James: **We not only have the power to set Satan in flight, we can ever trample him under foot.** Jesus says in Luke 10:19, "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you."

We have the authority to tear down his strongholds. Jesus promised in Matthew 16:18 that the gates of hell would not stand against the onslaught of the church militant. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:4&5 that we "demolish the strongholds of Satan." Listen to Joshua: not only did the walls of Jericho fall down, but so are the walls of Satan's kingdom. Soon and very soon his kingdom of darkness will be a heap of rubble.

We have the authority to bind all powers. In Matthew 16:18&19, after telling us that the Church will tear down the gates of Satan's kingdom, he gave it the power to bind all things on this earth. We have the power, in the name of Jesus, to rebuke Satan, to tell him to leave, to stand against him, and even to bind him from exercising his authority.

But let me warn you: treat him with respect. Jude 9 says that even the archangel Michael did not speak disrespectfully to Satan when they fought over the body of Moses. It is not our power and authority that we exercise, but the Lord's.

But this is the best news of all: our victory is certain because Satan's doom is sure. One day the people of clay will cheer in triumph as the fallen fire angels are cast down into the fires of Hell. Our wars will be over. Victory will be sweet and complete. So today, pull back the curtain and see your Enemy for who he is. Only then will you know the challenges of the battle ahead and the sure hope for the victories to follow.