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The Strange Triumph of a Slaughtered Lamb

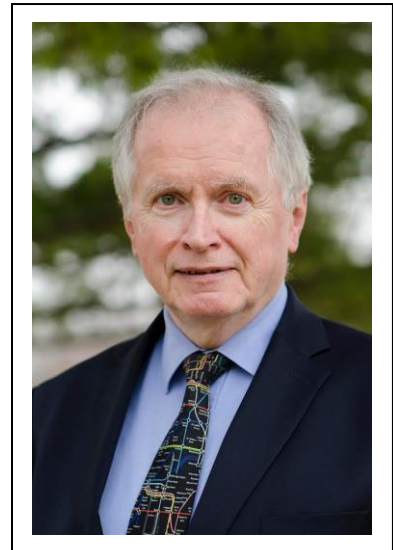
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Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.

Revelation 12:10–12 (NIV84)

One day when my son was about three, I asked him, “Nicholas, where did you get those big, wonderful, deep-blue eyes?” He replied with all of the certainty of a three-year-old, “From God.” Of course, he was right. Now he is a Marine—6 feet, 2 inches, a huge hunk. If I were to ask him today where he got those big, wonderful deep-blue eyes, he might reply with the same terms, I suppose, but he might say, “I have them because both you and Mum, though neither of you has blue eyes, must have carried the necessary recessive gene, and they combined to form my DNA.”



Which answer is truer?

They are both equally true.

Which answer is more fundamental or foundational?

A second question: What caused the disastrous defeat of Jerusalem and Judah in 587 B.C.?

One might mention many factors: the rise of the Babylonian superpower; the acquisitiveness of King Nebuchadnezzar; the decline and decay of the Davidic dynasty;

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the tragic pride, proud arrogance, and blind stupidity of King Hezekiah several monarchs earlier in the dynasty, when he exposed the wealth of the kingdom to the Babylonian emissaries; the criminal stupidity of Zedekiah despite Jeremiah's warnings; the sins of the people that attracted God's judgment.

Or one could simply say that God did it.

Which answer is truer? They are both equally true.

Which is more fundamental or foundational?

A third question: What made Job suffer? Again, we could adduce many answers: the Sabeans, the Chaldeans, and their bands of marauding riffs; the natural elements such as the windstorm that blew down the house and killed all ten of Job's children; bereavement; the illnesses that he suffered, scraping himself on an ash pit; a nagging wife; the false comfort of insensitive and theologically perverse friends.

Or one could say that Satan did it. One could even say that God did it, for Satan did not go one step beyond what God himself sanctioned.

Which answer is the most true?

They are all equally true.

Which is most fundamental or foundational?

A final question: What has caused the church her greatest sufferings during the last several decades? Of course, answers will vary enormously with location. In China, for instance, Marxist totalitarianism with a Chinese face surfaces from time to time in regional repression of Christians. This has certainly been a significant factor in the feelings of pressure that the church faces there, at least outside the special economic zones. By contrast, in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the church has been part of tribalism and the endless petty wars that tribalism generates, sometimes breaking out in horrendous bloodbaths. This is the residue of the colonial period that drew boundaries for the convenience of the former colonial powers without regard to tribal affinities. The inability of these countries to move toward a stable form of government that does not get overthrown a few years later by the next tribal movement or military takeover signals the absence of strong legal and constitutional traditions, not to mention the shortage of trained leadership.

The rapid urbanization of many populations and the growth of tertiary education in many African countries have also fueled the church's challenges. In urban settings in

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central Africa, a common saying is, “The pew is higher than the pulpit.” In other words, in the urban areas there is a new generation of young, well-trained Africans who have had university education, while too many of the pastors have received only a fifth-, sixth-, seventh-, or eighth-grade education with a little Bible on top of that. I have not yet mentioned pressures from AIDS: not fewer than twelve million Africans have the HIV virus. In some villages of Uganda and Tanzania, entire populations between the ages of fifteen and sixty-five have been decimated. They call it the skinny disease. Not long ago I was in Soweto, in South Africa, where pastors regularly hold seven or eight funerals a week for AIDS victims. One could mention drought in the Sahel. Especially important is the rising tension with militant Islam in the bordering states like Sudan, Nigeria, and Eritrea. In short, Christians in Africa, though great in numbers, are weak in leadership, training, and vision for the future.

And what shall we say of the West? Here the church faces another set of challenges. Here we find material prosperity, despite the recession, coupled with (in some parts of the country) an astonishing, even an appalling, poverty. The rapid pace of life often squeezes what is important to the periphery: the urgent displaces the important, the digital displaces the personal. The mass media affect our thinking whether we like it or not, leaving us entertained, titillated, or, ironically, bored, while Madison Avenue establishes our self-identity in many things, as long as none of them has eternal significance. The pressures of secularization allow us to be religious provided our religion does not really matter: even Christian faith is funneled into privacy. It is hard to believe that a bare one hundred twenty years ago (the late 1800s) the media cabled Charles Spurgeon’s Sunday sermons to New York to be published in the Monday morning edition of the *New York Times*. People wanted the whole Spurgeon sermon printed in the press on Monday morning for their breakfast.

Can you imagine that today? Even at the level of reading, there were at the time literally hundreds of small publishing houses that produced poetry books. Hard to believe, isn’t it? People then would sit down and read a volume of poetry the way they might sit down now and watch a program on TV. Today the national discourse concerns economics, politics, sports, international affairs that are of interest to us, and media stars who have become powerful for no other reason than that they are in the media. *But the national discourse rarely concerns truth, integrity, or God; or, if it does talk about God, it does not really talk about God but about the response of various people to people who talk about God.*

One hundred fifty years ago one could not discuss any item at the national level without bringing up questions of providence and what God is doing in history. Today even to raise the topic of providence makes one sound old-fashioned and vaguely irrelevant. Many in our society have been taught that in the religious realm the only view that is

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wrong is the view that says that any other view is wrong. The only heresy is to insist that there is such a thing as heresy. Compound such social trends with moral and theological indifferentism and prayerlessness in many of our churches, and it is easy to detect widespread malaise. And the church is suffering on account of it.

But have you noticed the categories we have used in this discussion of what ails the church in the West? They are all sociological, historical, occasional, demographic, economic, psychological, medical. They are all performance-related, circumstance-related. There is nothing about the Devil—and nothing about God.

I am certainly not suggesting that there is nothing to be learned from sociological and demographic analysis. Such analysis is helpful not only for missionaries who go to another culture to learn the language, customs, and mores of the people (their habits, biases, sense of humor, etc.) but also to help us understand our own culture, not least when our culture is changing quickly. In addition to categories like baby boomers and baby busters, Generation X, and Generation Y, most of our cities now boast many different ethnicities, movements, economic strata, and so on. It is helpful to know what is going on in the minds of university students before you evangelize them. It really is a valuable exercise to ask and answer these sorts of questions.

But if all of our *analyses* are restricted exclusively to such categories, the huge danger is that our *solutions* will be cast in such categories too. Our answers will be superficially sociological because we do not probe deeply enough to analyze the cosmic tension between God and the Devil. And then, quite frankly, we do not really need God. He could get up and walk out, and we would not miss him. We have got this thing taped; our analyses are quantifiable.

In the chapter before us (Revelation 12), John provides us with a glimpse of the church's problems from God's perspective. The literary genre he uses is apocalyptic. That genre sometimes seems strange to us today because it is no longer written (though it was common enough in Jewish and Christian circles from about 300 B.C. to about A.D. 300, with tentacles reaching back much earlier). Apocalyptic literature uses colorful arrays of symbols and metaphors to analyze human situations from the perspective of heaven. If I understand the passage before us aright, God here gives us a deeper analysis of the difficulties and sufferings of the church, and then teaches us something of how to be faithful.

Revelation 12 to 14 marks a major division in the Apocalypse. These chapters constitute a major hiatus before the final display of God's wrath in the seven plagues of Revelation 16. John traces in these chapters the underlying cause for the hostility and suffering that fall upon the church. That cause is nothing less than the rage of Satan against the church.

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If you do not have a category for Satan's rage, John says, then you cannot understand deeply what is happening in contemporary Christianity.

John Outlines the Occasion for This Satanic Rage (Rev. 12:1–9)

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In John's vision the scene opens with a great and wondrous sign appearing in heaven. "Sign" here, as elsewhere in the book of Revelation and occasionally in the OT, refers to a great spectacle that points in some way to the consummation. The content of this sign or spectacle is a woman, and what a woman she is: "a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head" (v. 1).

Who is she? Some across church history have suggested that she is Mary because she gives birth to "a son, a male child, who 'will rule all the nations with an iron scepter' " (v. 5). The son in verse 5 clearly refers to Jesus. But the view that the woman is Mary is refuted a little farther on, in verse 17 (not infrequently in apocalyptic literature a symbol is introduced and then unpacked later): "Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus." Here the woman cannot be Mary. This woman is the messianic community as a whole, whether under the old covenant or the new. Just as Israel under the old covenant is symbolically understood to be the mother of the people of God (e.g., Isa. 54:1—"Sing, barren woman"—is addressed to Zion=Jerusalem), so under the new covenant, the heavenly Jerusalem is our mother: "the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother" (Gal. 4:26). The Messiah springs from this mother, out of this woman, out of this messianic community. The messianic community gives birth to this child, and then the messianic community continues. The messianic community's children are the ones being persecuted in Revelation 12:17—and this side of the cross, the messianic community's children are Christians.

The woman is "clothed with the sun" (v. 1); she is utterly radiant. Her feet on the moon suggest dominion. The "twelve stars on her head" are probably evocative of both the twelve tribes of the old covenant and the twelve apostles of the new, representing the fullness of the people of God. (Jesus links these two groups of twelve in Matthew 19.)

But the important thing for the drama is that she is pregnant: "She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth" (v. 2). Descriptions such as this generated the expression "the birth pains of the Messiah." This expression did not refer to the pains that the Messiah himself suffered, but the pains of the messianic community as the

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Messiah came to birth. Such sentiments are grounded in Old Testament pictures and realities. For example, Isaiah 26:17:

As a pregnant woman about to give birth
writhes and cries out in her pain,
so were we in your presence, Lord.

Thus, it was understood before the Messiah came that the people of God (the woman in Revelation 12) would go through the birth pains of the Messiah. She is in travail, pregnant, waiting for the coming of the Messiah.

The old covenant community gives birth to the Messiah, and this community continues after the Messiah is born; the old community remains in connection with the new community (Rev. 12:17). So what we have in these opening verses is true Israel, the messianic community, in an agony of suffering and expectation as the Messiah comes to birth. That is the first sign or spectacle.

The second spectacle is an enormous red dragon (v. 3). If we have any doubts about who or what the red dragon is, verse 9 identifies him as “that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.” Dragon, leviathan, monster of the deep—these are standard symbols for all that opposes God, and sometimes for the Devil himself. Sometimes these creatures manifest themselves in historic entities. Thus the dragon or Satan is associated with Egypt in connection with the exodus (Psalm 74), elsewhere with Assyria and Babylon (Isaiah 27), Pharaoh (Ezekiel 29), and even Peter (Matthew 16 and parallels). You will recall the context of this last-named incident. Jesus asks, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (Matt. 16:13). Peter, prompted by God himself, replies, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). Jesus responds, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven” (v. 17). And from that point on he then speaks more clearly of his impending death and resurrection.

But that is too much for Peter. By his lights, a crucified Messiah is a contradiction in terms. Having scored once and received praise from the Master, he tries to score again: “Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!” (v. 22). Peter recoiled at the notion that the Messiah would have to die, but Jesus wheels on him: “Get behind me, *Satan!*” (v. 23). Jesus is certainly not saying that Peter’s mind has clicked off and that he has been taken over by Satan himself (i.e., that he is demon-possessed). Rather, Peter is speaking what *Peter* thinks; Peter is giving his considered judgment. This is Peter’s utterance and folly. But Peter’s judgment is diabolical and wrongheaded in that it fails to understand that the Messiah is also the suffering Servant. Thus, the voice behind Peter’s voice is Satan’s. It reflects Satan’s blinding, deceiving, destroying work. Peter’s judgment is fundamentally

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false when it should have been right. It was Satan's work as it was Satan's work behind Pharaoh, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and myriads of forms today.

Satan is a "red dragon" (Rev. 12:3), almost certainly a symbol for blood, for his murderousness, recalling the words of Jesus: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). By Satan's work the entire human race died.

The dragon has "seven heads" (Rev. 12:3). Apocalyptic often has mixed metaphors: seven heads, ten horns, seven crowns. Apparently the ten horns are not evenly distributed on the seven heads! This is not something to be taken literally. Like Leviathan's multiple heads in Psalm 74:14, the "seven heads" refer to the universality of his power; he "leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9).

Horns typically signify kings or king-dominion: awesome power and kingly authority. This recalls the fourth beast of Daniel 7.

The crowns on his head are not victory wreaths but crowns of arrogated, usurped authority against him who is in fact rightly the one who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter" (Rev. 12:5), the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

The dragon's tail, we are told, "swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth" (v. 4). This is not some form of mistaken ancient cosmology demonstrating that the biblical authors were woefully ignorant of scientific facts. Rather, this is part of apocalyptic metaphor that derives from Hebrew poetry in which all of nature gets involved in everything. When things go well, the hills dance and the trees clap their hands. When things are bad, the stars fall from the sky, and nature falls into disarray. This is exactly what happens here. Satan is about to attempt something that is utterly catastrophic, so his tail swings around and a third of the universe collapses. The language is drawn from Daniel 8:9–10.

What is Satan trying to do? The scene is grotesque. The dragon stands in front of the woman. She is lying there in labor. Her feet are in the stirrups, writhing as she pushes to give birth, and this disgusting dragon is waiting to grab the baby as it comes out of the birth canal and then eat it (12:4). The scene is meant to be grotesque: it reflects the implacable rage of Satan against the arriving Messiah.

Do we not know how this works out in historical terms? The first bloodbath in the time of Jesus takes place in the little village of Bethlehem—in the slaughter of the innocents as Herod tries to squash this baby's perceived threat to his throne. Jesus is saved by Joseph, who is warned by God in a dream and flees to Egypt. Herod, in a rage, "gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under" (Matt.

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2:16). Satan later manifests his rage against Jesus in the temptation, and he manifests his rage against the church in every temptation. Satan's rage manifests itself when some people try to push Jesus over a cliff, and others take up stones to stone him. Satan is after Jesus and wants to destroy him by any means possible. Behind all these attempts to destroy Jesus is the red dragon, and behind the red dragon is God himself, bringing to pass his purposes even in the death of his Son to bring about our redemption.

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But the text does not go on to talk about Jesus' triumph here, not because this book has no interest in him but because the triumph of Jesus has already been spectacularly introduced in Revelation 4–5. The great vision of Revelation 4–5 controls the entire book. There we learn that Christ, this male child, is the only one who is fit to open the scroll in God's right hand to bring about all of God's purposes for judgment and blessing. He is the Lion and the Lamb, the reigning king and the bloody sacrifice, the heir to David's throne yet the one who appears from God's throne. Because of his struggle, men and women from every tongue and tribe and people and nation are redeemed. Countless millions gather around him who sits on the throne and the Lamb and sing a new song of adoring, grateful, praise.

But here in Revelation 12 we move from Jesus' birth to his ascension; we run through his entire life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension in two lines: he "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter" and "was snatched up to God and to his throne" (v. 5). The male child, Jesus, is born and snatched to heaven. In other words, this passage focuses not on Christ's triumph—that is presupposed—but on what happens to the woman and her children, the ones left behind. And that is us: the messianic community, the people of God, the blood-bought church of Jesus Christ. This side of the cross they are described as "those who obey God's commands and hold the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17). The woman (the messianic community) is the focus of the passage.

The woman flees to the wilderness for 1,260 days (v. 6). There are two elements of great importance here: the significance of the wilderness and of the 1,260 days.

1) *The significance of the wilderness.* The messianic community—the church—flees to the wilderness. What would that mean to a first-century Christian reader?

The wilderness is the place through which the messianic community of the old covenant passed on the way to the Promised Land. As such, it was a time of testing, difficulty, temptation, and judgment. It was not yet the Promised Land. It was the desert. But at the same time, it was the place where God had so miraculously provided for his people that later prophets could look back on it as a time of intimacy, wooing, and winning. There God performed wonderful miracles: water from a rock, the provision of manna and quail, the preservation of their shoes. God taught them wonderful lessons in revealed words

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and spectacular miracles. Because of God's faithfulness to his covenant community as they passed through the desert on the way to the Promised Land, the same expression is picked up later by the prophets. Thus in Hosea 2, when the people of God are again betraying him and committing spiritual adultery, God says, "Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her *into the desert* and speak tenderly to her" (Hos. 2:14). The wilderness was not only the place of trial and testing; it is also the place where God led his people with the tender wooing affections of a courtier. God is winning his people, cherishing them, drawing them to himself, saving them, protecting them until the consummation, and preparing them for the move into the Promised Land.

That is what is going on here in verse 6 and a little later in the chapter. The woman flees to the desert to get away from Satan. The desert is scarcely hospitable, but it is prepared for the woman by God. God is nurturing his own people in the desert afresh in preparation for the consummation (the ultimate Promised Land). So also in the church's experience today: we may have to go through terrible hardships, but those hardships are accompanied by the wonderful, wooing, grace of God.

2) *The significance of the 1,260 days.* What does "1,260 days" mean? There have been endless speculations and dogmatic assertions about various interpretations.

A good place to start is recognition that many cultures have in their history a specified period of time that carries a symbol-laden value. I am a Canadian by birth, but I have lived in America for three decades. My children were born here and have attended American schools. Even I, a foreigner, know that the overwhelming majority of Americans would instantly know where this number comes from: "fourscore and seven years." Regardless of whether you are from the North or the South, you know when and where those words were spoken. They come from the first sentence of what is perhaps the most remarkable speech in American history: "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." In other words, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has become stamped on the psychology of the American schoolchild, whether white, black, Asian, or Latin-American—it does not matter. It is part of the American heritage, and it is inseparably linked to the Civil War and its entailments. It is part of American mythology.

In Israel, the period of time with corresponding mythic power was three and a half years. Two centuries before Christ, there arose one of the most grisly episodes in Jewish history, an episode foreseen by Daniel. In the book of Revelation, the crucial period of time is indicated by four synonymous expressions: forty-two months (based on the ideal month of thirty days), 1,260 days, three and a half years, and time (i.e., one year), times (i.e., two years), and half a time (i.e., one-half of a year); see 11:2–3; 12:6, 14; 13:5. They refer to the

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same thing and share the same significance. For Jewish and Christian readers in the first century, this period of immense suffering instantly calls to mind the wretched reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

A little history explains why he was such an important figure. After the people of God began to return to the Promised Land (i.e., after the exile), eventually the old Persian Empire broke up, crushed by the Greeks. Then the Greek empire fell apart as well. It was divided into four parts, each ruled by one of the four senior generals of Alexander the Great. One of those generals started the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt; another started the Seleucid dynasty in Syria. Little Israel was squashed between those two opposing powers, and it was forced to curry favor with each side, scrambling incessantly to support whichever side seemed to be in the ascendancy. In this period, however, Israel was never independent. It was a no-man's land for decade after decade of ruthless, bloodthirsty, recurrent, strife.

By 167 B.C., the Seleucids in Syria, to the north, finally won control over Israel. The Seleucid king was Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a cruel and bloody man. He determined to crush all forms of Jewish worship, to force-feed paganism to Israel and establish Hellenistic religions. He moved his armies into Jerusalem. He sacrificed pigs in the new temple in Jerusalem. He made it a capital offense to observe any Jewish rite such as circumcision or the Sabbath, to own or read any part of Scripture, or to be a priest.

So the slaughter began. The emissaries of Antiochus IV Epiphanes murdered many people, including many priests. In due course the troops arrived at a small village in the hill country of Judea and encountered an old priest named Mattathias. When one of the emissaries approached him, Mattathias killed him. Mattathias had three sons. One was Judas Maccabeus (Judas "the hammer"). Judas Maccabeus began a campaign of guerrilla warfare. Doubtless others had adopted this tactic at an earlier period, but his guerrilla tactics are the first detailed descriptions of guerrilla warfare we have (e.g., hiding in the hills and hit-and-run attacks). Josephus records the struggle in some detail. After *three and a half years* of bloody warfare (the Maccabean Revolt), there was finally a pitched battle on the shores of the Orontes River, and the Jews soundly defeated the Syrians and rededicated the temple in 164 B.C. For the first time in more than four hundred years, Israel was an independent nation.

Because that three-and-a-half-year period was such a burning memory in the Jews' mind from that point on (and they understood it in connection with their interpretation of Daniel), they came to think of three and a half years as a time of severe testing, opposition, and tribulation before God himself gave his people rest again. That is what is being said here in Revelation 12. This woman flees into the desert and faces a time of testing, opposition, and tribulation for a constrained period of time before God himself comes

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and gives final release. "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive" (Matt. 24:22a).

Thus, for Jews and Christians alike, three and a half years became emblematic of a period of intense suffering (of whatever duration) before God manifests himself in saving power. Of course, when John was writing this book, the Maccabean Revolt was more than two centuries behind him, but the point is that the 1,260 days had become emblematic for any period of severe suffering. John uses the expression to refer to the *entire* period of suffering between Jesus' first and second advents. It is the period when there will be suffering, opposition, attack, and death. But ultimately there will be vindication at the end as God moves in.

Meanwhile the events in heaven mirror the events on earth (Rev. 12:7–9). The dragon fights angelic beings and is cast out. This is equivalent to Jesus' own teaching: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). With the onset of the Messianic ministry, Satan is banished from heaven. When Jesus says this during his ministry, he does so in connection with the preaching and displays of power of the gospel itself as it is promulgated through his own appointed disciples—all of this in anticipation of the cross and resurrection that are just around the corner. "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." So also hear: "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray" (Rev. 12:9). The decisive turning point has taken place; he is defeated in principle. That happened at the cross, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus, at the dawning of the kingdom of God.

This is a major theme in Scripture. In Job, for instance, Satan appears in the presence of God along with "the sons of God"—other angelic beings. It is almost as if Satan has access to God at that point precisely because the redeeming work of Christ is not yet done. Satan is "the accuser of our brothers" (12:10): "You see, God, this Job character claims to be devoted to you only because you have nurtured him. He is actually a rotter. In his heart he will curse you to your face if you merely take away some of the protection with which you have shielded him." And thus the drama of the book of Job begins.

But now Satan is cast out of heaven. The accuser of the brothers and sisters is gone. Why? There has been war in heaven, and he has been cast out. The reason he has been cast out is the triumph of Christ. Satan has no basis for such accusation anymore. Why? Because a redeemer has arisen.

That becomes the basis for the next turn in the argument. As we shall see, the central point of the next verses, cast in poetic form, is that the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been hurled down (vv. 10, 12).

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John Identifies the Reasons for This Satanic Rage (Rev. 12:10, 12–17)

Satan's sphere is now restricted, and his time is short (12:10, 12–13)

Once Satan has been hurled to the earth (v. 9), John “heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ’ ” (v. 10a). The kingdom has dawned. It is here. It is not yet consummated, but it is now come. It has started. One of the ways in which this has been demonstrated is that Satan himself has been decisively defeated. Or in terms of the symbolism of 12:7–9, Satan has been cast out of heaven. He has no standing before God whatsoever. He cannot bring accusations against the brothers anymore, “for the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down” (v. 10b). Satan, though doubtless he has been operating on the earth since the beginning of the creation, is now restricted to the earth and has lost his access to God that had enabled him to accuse us before God so directly.

So Satan turns all his rage and vengeance upon the woman (i.e., upon *us*, the messianic community): “When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child” (v. 13). It is precisely the Devil’s restriction in authority that is the fundamental reason here for his rage in this restricted sphere. Satan is not only wicked; he is frustrated, angry, and vituperative. “He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short” (v. 12). Satan is full of rage not because he is so spectacularly strong, but because he knows that he is defeated, his end is in sight, the range of his operations is curtailed—and he is furious. He knows that in principle he is already undone.

This reaction is psychologically believable because it has happened many times in history. For instance, during the Gulf War, once the allies had arrived with a quarter of a million troops, tons of materiel, and sophisticated weapons that Saddam Hussein could not possibly match, anyone with half a brain in his head knew that it was over. It was uncertain how bloody it might be and what setbacks might be encountered, but it was over. Does that mean that Saddam Hussein quit? No, he ordered his troops to fight, and they were killed and captured by the thousands. They fired all the oil wells in Kuwait on their way out. Saddam did the most vengeful things when it was clear that he was already beaten. It was not rational, yet his response was not atypical for defeated despots.

Is this not what Hitler did in World War II? By 1944, the Germans were losing ground on the eastern front. At tremendous cost, the Russians were pressing against them. The other allies had cleaned out North Africa and landed on the boot of Italy and were coming up

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the boot. Then in June, on D-Day, the troops landed on the beaches of Normandy. Within three days they had pumped in 1.1 million troops and tons of war materiel. Anybody with half a brain in his head and an ounce of historical knowledge could see that the war was over and that Hitler was finished. In terms of resources, numbers of soldiers, money (on which war finally turns), energy, and supplies, the war was over. It was not just a matter of who was winning this or that battle. Japan could turn out about seven tons of steel a year; Germany was being bombed flat and could not produce more than thirteen or fourteen tons. America alone was producing fifty to sixty tons. The figures were all on the allies' side. Just give it time. Hitler was finished. Does that mean that Hitler quit? That is what most of his generals wanted him to do. But no, after that came the Battle of the Bulge and then the assault on Berlin—some of the worst fighting of the war. Hitler knew that his time was short, but he did not quit; it merely filled him with increased rage.

That is the nature of the opposition we face. Satan's sphere is restricted, his time is short, and he is angry. He cannot get directly at Jesus, so he aims to do as much damage as he possibly can to Jesus' people, to the woman; that is, to you and me. The troubles of Christ's people (the children of the woman) arise not because Satan is too strong but because he is beaten in principle and will rage violently to the very end. Our present conflict belongs to this cosmic scope.

Moreover, Satan's success will be limited (12:13–17)

Much of the description of Satan's attack on the people of God, along with the defensive moves that God takes to protect his people, are cast in terms of events that took place in the years of Israel's wilderness wandering. "The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert" (v. 14a). This is probably picking up language from Exodus 19:4: "You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." Revelation 13:14–17 evokes many similar bits of exodus typology. The woman is borne along by God himself to the wilderness introduced in 12:6.

"She would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach" (v. 14b). There it is again: a period of testing before the final release. Does this mean that the woman really is "out of the serpent's reach"? Is there no more trouble to worry about? No, the serpent is busy chasing her, so he tries to drown her by spewing "water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent" (v. 15). This is almost certainly a reference to Exodus 1–2, where again Satan, using Pharaoh, tried to sweep away the entire promised line, commanding that every male child be drowned in the Nile River. Again, Satan wants the church destroyed.

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But God is not finished. “The earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth” (Rev. 12:16). Does that mean that the Devil quits? No, he is even more enraged: “Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God’s commands and hold the testimony of Jesus” (v. 17). If we went on to read the next chapter (Revelation 13), we would discover that Satan has two important cohorts: the antichrist and the false prophet, one connected with the sea and the other with the land. Satan’s domain is limited to the land and the sea (12:12), and so in Revelation 13 the beasts come out of the land and the sea and constitute, with Satan himself, an unholy triumvirate, the Satanic trinity: Satan, the beast out of the land, and the beast out of the sea. How Satan works out this opposition through his cohorts is unpacked in the next two chapters.

The reasons for Satan’s rage are clear: his sphere is restricted, his time is short, and his success is limited. The current conflict the church faces must be understood, for it is ours. This is where we live and move and have our being.

Before we press on, it is worth pausing to ask how this titanic struggle between Satan and the church is faring. Even if we know that Christ and his people will ultimately win, what is the state of play right now? Throughout the history of the Christian church, various theories have been advanced as to whether the world is getting better or worse. They are tied up with large schemes of eschatology (the doctrine of last things). In the Puritan period, the majority of Puritan pastors were postmillennialists; they believed that eventually a time of millennial splendor and glory before the Lord’s final return would be introduced by the preaching of the gospel. The postmillennialists believed that they were entering into a golden age of such magnificent earth-transforming power as the gospel was heralded afresh with renewed vigor, that in effect Christ would rule through his Word, through the church, and thus introduce an age of great missionary outreach and glory that could only be called millennial. It did not work out that way.

I remember reading, in 1993, the important book by Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. Fukuyama’s thesis at the time (he has since revised it) was that with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the major world conflicts were over. That was the sense of his dictum, that history was coming to an end. He did not mean *literally* that time had stopped but that the major world conflicts were now over. Liberal democracy was gradually going to win. Oh, yes, for hundreds of years there might be local skirmishes of one sort or another, but there was little possibility of another intercontinental war, another world war. The big wars had come to an end, liberal democracy had won, and we had reached the end of history. That is a kind of secular version of postmillennialism: world peace, not through the gospel, but through liberal democracy. I remember reading

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that book and thinking, “My dear Fukuyama, either you are right or Jesus is right, but you are not both right because Jesus said that all along there will be wars and rumors of wars” (Matt. 24:6).

By contrast, at other times in the history of the church Christians have fastened their attention on moral and cultural declension. Everything appears to be decaying. We are in one of those periods today in the Western world (though not in every part of the world). The voices of gloom tell us that the culture is declining, moral standards are eroding, integrity is disappearing. So now another set of biblical texts is commonly cited. Rather than saying, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab. 2:14; cf. Isa. 11:9), we relegate that prospect to the new heaven and the new earth. We prefer to quote, “Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). The world is going to get worse. The context of the latter verse, however, shows us that what is in Paul’s mind is not that each generation will be worse than the preceding generations but that evil people in every generation will become worse and worse.

So what, then, is the truth of the matter? In this massive struggle between the church of Jesus Christ and the rage of Satan himself, how is the fight going?

One of the most insightful ways of considering this question is to think through Jesus’ parable of the wheat and the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30):

Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

“The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

“ ‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

“ ‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. *Let both grow together until the harvest.* At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’ ”

Jesus acknowledges that an enemy has done this, but he insists that both wheat and weeds must grow until the end.

By virtually any calculation, in the last 150 years there has been greater international mission work and more conversions to Christ than in the preceding 1,800 years

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combined. The gospel has gone to more people and places than ever before. On the other hand, there have been more Christian martyrs in the last 150 years than in the preceding 1,800 years combined.

So what will happen in the twenty-first century? I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I will tell you what will happen if Jesus does not come back first: the world will continue to get both better and worse. The gospel will advance, and so will opposition. Christians will sow the gospel seed, and there will be outbreaks of revival and blessing here and there, times of sowing and harvesting that gather millions and millions of people. There will be a great ingathering along with great persecution, perhaps the greatest persecution that we have ever faced. This will not happen all at once entirely in the same place at the same time, but the King has declared, "Let both grow together until the harvest."

There will be wars and rumors of wars, so do not be alarmed; the end is not yet (Matt. 24:6). Satan is filled with fury, and he knows his time is short. It is poppycock to expect that things will only get better and that we will experience world peace if we have the right kind of president or policy. Do people not read history anymore? That utopian idealism is exactly what Woodrow Wilson wanted after World War I; hence the League of Nations. The result was World War II.

Do not misunderstand me. Not for a moment am I suggesting that there are not better or worse policies to follow, or that Christians should not be involved in the play for peace. I am suggesting, however, that to have a Pollyannaish view of history and human nature is deeply unbiblical. Worse: beyond all of the faults and failures and betrayals of human nature is the rage of Satan, who deludes the peoples of the world. He is full of fury because he knows that his time is short.

Our eschatological visions are too often constrained by our own narrow place in history. We do not take the broader view. Above all, we do not sufficiently submit to the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus: "Let both grow together until the harvest."

We have considered, then, some of the reasons for Satan's rage and briefly glanced at the consequence. But now, at last, some good news.

John Specifies How Christians Overcome This Satanic Rage (Rev. 12:11)

Verses 10 and 11 must be read together, for verse 10 is the crucial setting for verse 11:

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Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power
and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.

For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.

They overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;

they did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death.”

The setting (v. 10) reminds us that what is in view is the triumph of Christ, the onset of his reign, the dawning of Messiah’s kingdom—and it is coincidental with Satan’s destruction, with his being hurled out of heaven and, in subsequent verses, opening up his onslaught against Christians.

So what are the Christians to do about it? How do the offspring of the woman cope with this satanic rage? Three things are said of these believers:

They overcame him by (i.e., on the ground of) the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11a)

The great redemptive act that freed them from their sins (1:5) and established their right to reign as priests and kings (5:9) is also what gives them authority over Satan and enables them to overcome Satan and all of his accusations (12:11). Satan accuses Christians day and night. It is not just that he will work on our conscience to make us feel as dirty, guilty, defeated, destroyed, weak, and ugly as he possibly can; it is something worse: his entire ploy in the past is to accuse us *before God* day and night, bringing charges against us that we know we can never answer before the majesty of God’s holiness. What can we say in response? Will our defense be, “Oh, I’m not that bad!”? You will never beat Satan that way. Never. What you must say is, “Satan, I’m even worse than you think, but God loves me anyway. He has accepted me because of the blood of the Lamb.”

The preposition in the original here is very important. The English expression *by* might sound as if “the blood of the Lamb” is instrumental (*by* or *through* the blood of the Lamb), but the original is quite clear that they overcame him *on the ground of* “the blood of the

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Lamb.” The blood of the Lamb is the *ground* of our victory, not simply the *means* in some mechanical sense.

All Christian blessings and resources are grounded in the blood of the Lamb. From a Christian perspective, all the blessings and resources that are ours in Christ are grounded in the blood of the Lamb; they are secured by Jesus’ death and resurrection.

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Do you find yourself accepted before this holy God? If so, it is because of the blood of the Lamb. Have you received the blessed Holy Spirit? He has been poured out because of the blood of the Lamb. Do you have the prospect of consummated eternal life in glory? It was secured by the blood of the Lamb. Are you in the fellowship of saints, brothers and sisters who love Christ, the church of the living God, a new body, the body of Christ on earth? This is bought, secured, and constituted by the blood of the Lamb. Are you grateful for the spiritual armaments that Paul tells us to deploy (Ephesians 6)? The entire arsenal is at our disposal because of the blood of the Lamb. May we go to God in prayer? It is because of the blood of the Lamb. Do we find our wills strengthened by the Spirit? That incalculable benefit was secured by the blood of the Lamb.

Every whiff of victory over the principalities and powers of this dark age has been secured by the blood of the Lamb.

Picture two Jews with the remarkable names of Smith and Jones. They live in the land of Goshen almost a millennium and a half before Christ. It is early evening, and they are talking to each other near the end of the ten plagues. Mr. Smith says to Mr. Jones, “Mr. Jones, have you daubed the two doorposts and the lintel with the blood of the lamb tonight?”

Mr. Jones replies, “Oh, yes, I certainly have. You heard what Moses said. The angel of death is passing through the land. Some of the plagues have afflicted just the Egyptians, but some of them have been over the whole land. Moses insisted that this plague was going to run throughout the entire land of Goshen where we live, as well as the rest of Egypt. The firstborn of people and of cattle are going to be killed. The only exceptions are in those homes that have been daubed with lamb’s blood, the way Moses prescribed.” He pauses and then adds, “I’m really excited about this because this means that our redemption is drawing near. Of course, I’ve slaughtered the lamb. My friends and relatives are all here, and we’re ready to go. I’ve daubed the blood of the lamb on the two doorposts and on the lintel. How about you, Mr. Smith?”

Mr. Smith replies, “Well, of course, I’ve done the same thing. But boy, am I worried. Have you seen the things that have gone on around here the last few months? Frogs, lice, hail, death. Now Moses is talking about every firstborn. Look, I’ve got only one son; you’ve

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got three. I love my Charlie, and I don't want to lose him. I'm scared witless. There's not going to be any sleep for me tonight."

Rather surprised, Mr. Jones replies, "What are you worried about? God himself has promised through his servant Moses that if you daub the blood on the two doorposts and on the lintel, you are saved. Your child will be saved. Charlie will be here tomorrow morning. You've already put the blood on the two doorposts and on the lintel."

Mr. Smith replies, "Well, you've got that last bit right. I've certainly done that, but I'm scared witless just the same."

That night the angel of death passes through the land. Who loses his son? Mr. Smith or Mr. Jones?

The answer, of course, is neither—because the promise was based not on the intensity of their faith nor on the joy of their obedience but on whether they hid under the blood of the lamb.

Let's come at this another way. Do you ever have a day that runs something like this? You get up in the morning; it is drizzly and hot, and the air conditioner is broken. You reach for a clean, fresh pair of socks, and you can't find two that match. You stub your toe on that nail sticking out of the wall that you knew you should have fixed about three years ago. You cut yourself while you are shaving. You stumble down to breakfast, and that day your wife is going out for a special meeting with her friends and has not done anything. You go out to the car, put your key in the ignition, and it will not start. You knew that you should have had the battery checked, and it is deader than a dodo. You get to work late, and people are saying rude things about you. Then your boss says, "Have you finished that report yet? You're staying late tonight if you haven't." The whole day unfolds in one endless set of mini-irritants.

You have an opportunity to speak to some non-Christian friends—a neighbor, someone over the back fence, someone at the gas station—and you are already in such a sour frame that when they ask some dumb question about religion, you answer with a kind of curtness and condescending wit that leaves them shriveled up in a pile of embarrassment. You feel guilty, but you have done it now. Eventually you return home, and your wife has cooked this disgusting stew that your children like and that you detest. You cannot be civil to her, and she cannot be civil to you. The kids that night are really not behaving particularly well. Your wife wants you to do jobs, and you want to watch football.

Finally it is time for bed at the end of this long day, and your prayer runs something like this: "Dear God, this has been a rotten day. I'm not very proud of myself; I'm frankly

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ashamed. But I really don't have anything to say. I'm sorry I have not done better. Forgive my sin. Bless everybody in the world. Your will be done. In Jesus' name, Amen."

But then a few days later you wake up to find the air is refreshingly cool. The sun is shining, the windows are open, the fresh air is wafting through the screen, and you hear the birds singing. You smell something delightful: "Bacon! I can't believe it! I wonder what the celebration is." You get up and reach for clean socks and feel full of energy. You're whistling as you wash in the bathroom and then have a wonderful quiet time with your spouse. You eat a hearty breakfast and then go out to your car, put the key in the ignition, and VROOM!—the car starts right up and takes off. You get to work early. Everybody commends your industriousness and intelligence in the way you discharge your duties. Your boss says, "Wonderful to see you today! Did I tell you that you are going to get a raise? You did such a great job on that contract."

Now you come across that same person at the gas station, and wonder of wonders the poor brute actually asks another question. This time, however, you respond with wisdom, tact, gentleness, understanding, courtesy, insight, and kindness. Lo and behold, he promises to come to church with you this coming Sunday. Then you arrive home, and there is a joyous family dinner. The kids are behaving, and you have intimate conversation with your wife while the two of you clean up the kitchen.

Finally, at the end of that day you get down to pray, and your prayer goes something like this: "Eternal and matchless God, we bow in your glorious presence with brokenness and gratitude. We bless you that in your infinite mercies and great grace you have poured favor upon us. We are not worthy of the least of your mercies ..." And now you go on and on and on in flowery theological language. You thank God for all the things in the day, and then you pray for missionaries and their children and first cousins twice removed. Then you start praying for everyone you can think of in your church, and then you meditate on all the names of Christ that you can think of in Scripture. An hour goes by, and you go to bed and instantly fall asleep. Indeed, you go to sleep—justified.

On which of these two occasions have you fallen into the dreadful trap of paganism? God help us: the sad reality is that both approaches to God are abominations. How dare you approach the mercy-seat of God on the basis of what kind of day you had, as if that were the basis for our entrance into the presence of the sovereign and holy God? No wonder we cannot beat the Devil. This is works theology. It has nothing to do with grace and the exclusive sufficiency of Christ. Nothing.

Do you not understand that we overcome the accuser on the ground of the blood of Christ? Nothing more, nothing less. That is how we win. It is the only way we win. This is the only ground of our acceptance before God. That is why we can never get very far

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from the cross without distorting something fundamental, not only in doctrine but in elementary discipleship, faithful perseverance, obedience, and spiritual warfare against the enemy of our souls. If you drift far from the cross, you are done. You are defeated. We overcome the accuser of our brothers and sisters, we overcome our consciences, we overcome our bad tempers, we overcome our defeats, we overcome our lusts, we overcome our fears, we overcome our pettiness on the basis of the blood of the Lamb. We dare to approach a holy God praying in Jesus' name, appealing to the blood of the Lamb.

I need no other argument.
I need no other plea.
It is enough that Jesus died
And that he died for me.¹

They overcame him by the word of their testimony (Rev. 12:11b)

In the opening chapter of the Bible, God speaks, and worlds leap into being. He sends forth his word, and it accomplishes whatever he sends it out to do. His supreme message is the Word incarnate. Servants in the church rule through the Word. In the world at large, the only offensive weapon we have, according to the symbolism in Ephesians 6, is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. So what do Christians do when they try to overcome the Devil and all his tricks in this wicked world? The Devil is working through politics, corruption, the media, the state, declining morals, secularism, pluralism, educational systems, and much more. How do Christians fight back? Do they form a political party? Do they picket the White House? Do they send a lot of letters to the prime minister? Can you imagine Paul setting up a circuit of letters to send off to Caesar?

Do not misunderstand me. We live in a democracy, which is a different form of government from Paul's, and our Christian responsibilities in this kind of context may mean that we should give a lot of thought as to how to be salt and light in a corrupt and corroding society. We dare not withdraw into a little holy huddle. *But* we must recognize with every ounce of our being that what finally transforms society is the gospel. There are responsibilities to legislate correctly and pass good laws; God loves justice and holds every nation to account for justice. Promote the well-being of the city. Of course we are responsible to look after the poor. *But* at the end of the day, what transforms society is still the gospel.

How does the gospel advance? By the word of our testimony: "They overcame him ... by the word of their testimony" (Rev. 12:11). This does not mean that they gave their

¹ Chorus to Lidie H. Edmunds's hymn "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place."

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testimonies a lot. That may be a good thing to do, but that is not what this verse means. It refers to Christians bearing testimony to Christ; they bear witness to Christ. They gossip the gospel. They evangelize. That is the central way by which they bear witness to Christ.

There is no other way for the gospel to advance. You cannot see people converted by holding the sword to their throat. You cannot transform society by anything other than the proclamation of the gospel. What we *must* have is the promulgation and promotion of the gospel. Yet some of us have not shared the gospel with a single person in the last year or even five years. Even pastors fall into this trap as they retreat into a narrow little world where they talk only to other Christians. They have never made friends outside. They have no one with whom they can share the gospel completely, honestly, and generously. They do not talk about the gospel in the barber shop. They are afraid.

We overcome Satan on the ground of the blood of the cross, and we overcome also on the ground of this promulgated word. God has ordained that by the foolishness of the proclaimed message men and women will be saved.

It is not simply a question of how we survive the accusations of the Evil One. It is a question of how we fight the Evil One. We do so not by taking swords and becoming crusaders or by shooting the bad guys. We do so in the first instance by the proclamation of the gospel again and again and again. Thus, the kingdom of God advances by the power of the Spirit through the ministry of the Word. Not for a moment does that mitigate the importance of good deeds and understanding the social entailments of the gospel, but they are entailments *of the gospel*. It is *the gospel* that is preached. Thus, the only way that we can be defeated on this dimension is to be quiet. Our silence guarantees a measure of victory to Satan.

When was the last time you explained the gospel to an unbeliever one-on-one or one-on-three in a more-or-less neutral or even hostile environment? That is how the gospel advances. I know that conversion is finally a work of God. God can sweep through a population with great power and bring countless thousands into the kingdom in very short order. But normally the God of the Bible uses means. He has ordained that the gospel will advance by the foolishness of the Word preached, by bearing witness to Christ.

So when we look at our culture and observe, for example, rising polarities of worldview—one part still holding on to some of the residue of the Judeo-Christian heritage and other parts becoming more and more radicalized in philosophical materialism or in Eastern religions or in a dogmatic secular antithesis to Christianity—the first questions we ask should be these: How do we evangelize the people we do not like? How do we evangelize the people outside our heritage? How do we cross the

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barriers and evangelize people in the media or in another part of town or immigrants or Muslims? Do we evangelize only the people with whom we feel most comfortable? At the end of the day we overcome the Devil by bearing testimony to Jesus.

They overcame him by not loving their lives so much as to shrink from death (Rev. 12:11c)

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They overcame Satan simply because they were willing to die.

Christians used to write books on how to die well. Their great prayer was that in their declining hours when their minds were going and they were no longer in control (but there were Christians who loved self-discipline) they would not say anything that would bring shame on the cross. Do you ever hear Christians pray like that today? Their prayer today is more likely to be, "Give me another shot of morphine so that I don't have to suffer."

"They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death" (v. 11c). This is a rather different view of death from what drives many in the Western world. Suppose you belong to the official regime that decides to oppose the apostle Paul and the Christ whom he preaches. What are you going to do with Paul? Kill him? "For to me, to live is Christ," Paul writes—that is, it is living and promoting the gospel—"and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). It does not sound as if the threat of death will be a great deterrent to the apostle. We have been so relatively free in the West that we sometimes do not see what our brothers and sisters in Christ often face elsewhere. Those who compile the relevant statistics tell us that over the last ten years approximately 160,000 Christians a year have been martyred. It is easy to believe; there have been no fewer than two million martyrs alone, for example, in the southern Sudan during the last fifteen years or so. If 160,000 Christians continue to be martyred each year, it means that of all the Christians in the world today, one out of every two hundred will die a martyr's death. Now, of course, the martyrs are not evenly distributed across congregations, but would it not change our perspective a little bit if we saw it in those terms? Very few of us in the West are called upon to suffer like that—though there are rising cultural pressures that resort to mockery, ridicule, job pressures, and the like to keep Christians silent and ineffective. But there are many parts of the world where faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ is, potentially, a matter of life and death.

Yet there is a broader principle at stake—a call to Christians to die to self-interest. All Christians must die to self. We are to take up our cross and follow Christ, and this means that by conscious act of the will strengthened by the Spirit, we choose to die to self-interest daily and promote Christ's interests daily. For that is not only an integral part of what it means to follow Jesus, but it is one of the three crucial steps to defeating the Devil.

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The Devil is still filled with fury, for he knows that his time is short. And Christians? “They did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.” How are you going to stop a movement the members of which, by God’s sustaining grace, die to self-interest in order to serve the living God?

Conclusion

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There are two applications of overwhelming importance.

1) Analyze culture biblically and theologically, not merely sociologically and psychologically

In every generation we must analyze our situation biblically and theologically. I am certainly not saying that there is nothing to be learned about society from the surrounding disciplines. But we must understand that Revelation 12 gives us an analysis of the problems and challenges that the church faces that probes more deeply than the sociological, demographic, and historical dimensions to which we commonly first appeal. We need to understand and address those dimensions, too, of course, but Revelation 12 goes much deeper. It provides an analysis that is spiritual and cosmic in its sweep, and it provides the most fundamental of Christian responses. Martin Luther understood this very well. He taught us to sing:

And though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
His truth to triumph through us:

The Prince of Darkness grim,
We tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure,
For lo, his doom is sure,
One little word shall fell him.²

And that “little word” is the word of the gospel.

² Martin Luther, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” ca. 1529.

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2) *Use the weapons that Christ has provided, weapons based on Christ's atoning death*

These are the only effective weapons we have. Return to the cross and defeat the accuser of the brothers and sisters. Incessantly and in every venue bear witness to Christ, and defeat the accuser of the brothers and sisters. Retain courage and integrity in the face of opposition, because death cannot frighten those who follow the Prince of Life—and thereby defeat the accuser of the brothers and sisters.

Another song, “The Kingdom of Our God,” attempts to capture the message of Revelation 12:

The enemy is fearsome;
His fury terrifies.
His arrogance is loathsome;
His foul mouth vilifies
The Son of God in heaven,
The angels he installed,
The offspring of the woman—
The people God has called.

Our foe has been defeated;
He knows his time is short,
And far from being seated
In honor in God's court,
His certain doom is looming
Like clouds before a squall,
And blind rage marks his booming
Attack upon us all.

He loves to foster warfare
Or peace with great deceit.
He aims to fill his death lair
With rebels; he repeats
His filthy accusations
To make us doubt the Lord;
He doles out tribulations
Of famine, plagues, and sword.

The father of all murder,
His passion is the lie;

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In sin a tireless worker—
A tempter who will try
To dupe us with seduction,
Or persecute to death—
To challenge God's election,
Deny the Spirit's breath.

But we have overcome him by the blood of God's own Lamb.
We silence accusations; on Christ's death we take our stand.
The kingdom is advancing by the gospel we proclaim.
The truth to which we testify that frees from fear and shame.
We will not hide from danger, death, and other earthly loss,
For we are learning daily death, the pathway of the cross.
The devil fights with fury, with a cruel and bruising rod.
But we extol the triumph of the kingdom of our God.³

Prayer

Forbid, Lord God, that we should rest so comfortably in our easy and restless society, that we forget that one of the driving dimensions of Christian experience is warfare—not against flesh and blood but against all the hosts of darkness who are filled with rage against us. Help us, Lord God, to see the enemy and then to deploy the gospel answers, the gospel arms, the gospel solutions, which alone are sufficient in this conflict. So return us to the cross, to faithful, glorious, grateful proclamation of the gospel, to self-death that we may follow the Lord Jesus, who died and rose on our behalf.

Again, Lord God, we ask that we not think too much of the Devil, for he is in principle a defeated foe, regardless of how vicious and how full of rage and how cruel he is. So we thank you for the triumph of the Lamb. Yet we would not think too little of him either, and thus leave ourselves unguarded. Protect our minds. Increase our self-discipline. Enlarge our ability to discern that the fundamental issues in any local church are not party politics—who's up and who's down, who's popular and who's not, what color the carpet is, whether someone's nose is out of joint. The Devil himself is a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, yet he often moves subtly, deceiving if it were possible the very

³ D. A. Carson, "The Kingdom of Our God," track 2, in *Shout with Delight*, vol. 1 of *New Songs for the People of God* (1999).

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elect. So lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.⁴

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Carson has been described as doing "the most seminal New Testament work by contemporary evangelicals"⁶ and as "one of the last great Renaissance men in evangelical biblical scholarship."⁷ He has written on a wide range of topics including New Testament, hermeneutics, biblical theology, the Greek New Testament, the use of the Old Testament in the New, and more.

⁴ Carson, D. A. (2010). *Scandalous: the cross and resurrection of Jesus* (pp. 74–111). Crossway.

⁵ <https://www.etsjets.org/node/12592>

⁶ Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 136.

⁷ Köstenberger, Andreas J. "Detailed biography on D.A. Carson" (PDF). Archived from the original (PDF) on 2009-08-24. Page 5.