

Sermon for March 12, 2025, Lenten Midweek 2

The Good News of a Savior Who Conquers Evil

Text: Genesis 3:14–15

While World War I was being fought, it was sometimes called “the war to end all wars.” Now, we can appreciate how that would have been an inspiring hope and an appealing dream. But it wasn’t long before people learned that that hope had been misplaced and that dream would not be coming true, as that war was followed by another and another and so on, right down to today.

That does not mean, though, that the dream has to die, or that we should give up all hope of a “war to end all wars.” In fact, in this evening’s Scripture readings, particularly the second of our midweek texts from Genesis, our Lord gives us the good news of the real “war to end all wars.” This week’s Good News from the beginning is that that war has indeed been fought and the outcome is certain, because the decisive victory has already been won. Jesus Christ has won the victory over all our enemies for us.

The war began in heaven, when one of the angels whom God had created good and holy was not content to remain in the blessed condition God had given him. Instead, he rose up in rebellion against God and as a result, he and his fellow rebels were cast out of heaven. The war between good and evil had begun, not because God wanted it, but because the war had been brought to him.

The fallen angel who had led that rebellion, known as Satan, then expanded the war to another front by bringing it to earth. Up to that time, everything in this creation had been “very good”; it had been perfect. Adam and Eve, the first of mankind had been at peace with each other, and they had enjoyed the perfect peace of unobstructed fellowship with the Lord their God. But evil could not stand to see such love and peace, so Satan invaded God’s good creation.

Concealing himself in the form of a serpent, Satan came to the garden and took aim directly at Adam and Eve’s relationship with the Lord.

Through his subtle questions, suggestions, and lies, he invited them to question whether they could believe what God had said to them and therefore to question also God's love for them. He led them to believe that God was not caring for them but was holding them back. If they were to eat of the one tree of which God had told them not to eat, the serpent said, they would not die as God had warned; instead, they would then be just like God themselves.

As soon as the woman and her husband who was with her followed Satan into doubt and discontent, their battle with the devil was already lost. And as they ate of the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened, and they saw that this was no longer the paradise they had known. The peace there had been between Adam and Eve and between God and mankind was no more.

The war that had begun in heaven had come to earth. God's good creation, which he had intended to be a paradise for us to enjoy, had by our sin been turned into a battlefield.

At this point, with that battle lost, it might have appeared that the tide of the whole war between good and evil had turned. But Satan had very little time to savor the moment before his celebration was cut short. Having confronted Adam and Eve with their sin, the Lord then turned to Satan and addressed him.

The Lord's first words were directed to the serpent that had served as Satan's mouthpiece: ***"Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life"*** (v 14).

Though spoken to the serpent that Satan had used, those words were also a message to Satan himself. From that time on, the low status of a serpent would serve as a stark depiction of the low status of Satan, and the picture of a serpent eating dust would serve as a preview of the eventual defeat of Satan.

Next, the Lord spoke more specifically about Satan's defeat as he gave an overview of the course this war would take. The Lord said to Satan: ***"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel"*** (v 15). Here the Lord promises the coming Christ and his victory over Satan. In the Bible, we see three phases in God's gracious work that culminate in this victory.

First, God would put enmity between Satan and the woman. Satan had led Eve away from the Lord, but the Lord would graciously draw her back to his side. In this way, the Lord would begin his work of reversing the damage Satan had done.

Completing that work would take time, though. In the second phase of the conflict described by the Lord, he would put enmity between Satan's offspring and the woman's offspring. All these offspring would be physically descended from Eve. Some, in their opposition to the Lord, would actually bear more resemblance to Satan, and so they could be figuratively described as his offspring.

Others, though, would share Eve's faith and so would be her offspring not only by descent but in a spiritual sense as well. Satan's offspring (all unbelievers down through time) would oppose the faithful offspring of Eve (all believers down through time) but the Lord would at all times preserve on earth a faithful remnant of believers.

And from that faithful remnant would eventually come one specific Offspring in whom the third and climactic phase of conflict would come to fulfillment. That one specific Offspring of the woman would engage Satan directly in battle. He would crush Satan's head, and Satan would strike his heel. Though it would come at a painful cost, that promised Offspring, the promised Seed would emerge victorious. Satan would go down in defeat. And the war would be over. Exactly as the Lord promised this war would go, so it has gone.

If that was Eve's hope for her first son, she would be sorely disappointed. Instead, in that son, Cain, we see the beginning of the second stage of conflict foretold by the Lord.

As Cain slew his faithful brother Abel, the conflict between Satan's offspring and Eve's offspring was clearly underway, a conflict that then continued, generation after generation.

Finally, and most importantly, the third and climactic phase of conflict foretold by the Lord also came to fulfillment. One who was born of a woman went head-to-head in battle against Satan.

This promised One was Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary. This promised Son came to redeem us, to set us free from the powers of sin, death, and devil. In John's first epistle, he puts it this way: ***"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil"*** (1 John 3:8).

And how did he destroy the devil's work and set us free? By redeeming us with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, Jesus secured our freedom. By paying for our sins in full and reconciling us to the Father, Jesus took away the devil's right to lay any claim on us.

He destroyed the devil's power. In the words of our Epistle reading, Jesus came and shared in our humanity ***“that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery”*** (Hebrews 2:14–15).

As the Lord had said would happen, that victory did come at a tremendous cost to our Redeemer, as that serpent Satan struck him a cruel, painful, and deadly blow. But in his very death, Jesus, the promised Seed, utterly defeated Satan by saving all of us from him. He crushed the serpent's head. He proclaimed that victory to the defeated powers of darkness in his descent to hell, and he publicly demonstrated that victory in his victorious resurrection from the dead.

That does, though, raise some significant questions. If Jesus has already won the victory over the devil for us, why do we still see the influence of the devil in this world.

Why does God call on us in Scripture still to be sober-minded and watchful, resisting the devil who prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8–9)? Why does it feel like the war is not over, and why does it often feel like we’re not faring so well in the battles we face daily in our hearts and lives?

To understand this, it can help to consider an example from another war. In World War II, when the allies were victorious on D-Day and had successfully landed a massive army back on the European continent, the outcome of the war in Europe was certain. The decisive blow had been dealt. The Allied army would push irresistibly toward the enemy German homeland. But the war in Europe didn’t actually come to its completion until eleven months later, on V-E Day. The enemy fought tooth and nail until the end.

In a similar way, in his death and resurrection, Christ has already dealt Satan the decisive, fatal blow that guarantees the outcome of the war.

But the war won't come to its final completion until Judgment Day, when Christ's victory will be complete. Meanwhile, we live in the gap between the "already" and the "not yet" the period when the decisive battle has already been won but the fighting is not yet over; Satan and his forces will fight until the bitter end.

As we wait, though, we do so with full assurance of the final result. Though life can feel like a battle as we continue struggling against the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature, we know how it all ends. We know that, in the end, we win because Christ has won the victory for us, and he shares his victory with us. By God's grace, through faith in Christ Jesus, victory is ours.

"Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Amen