

The Cosmic Controversy

Memory Text: “And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Revelation 12:17)

Setting The Stage: The dragon is Satan (Rev. 12:9), and Satan is also referred to as “the serpent”—a direct reference to Genesis 3 and the vehicle through which the devil successfully deceived Eve.

I don't like snakes. An old friend of mine loves them. But he was smart; he kept them in an enclosure, but that enclosure was in the house. It would be better if they were out of the house entirely!

In Malaysia firefighters are often called to deal with snakes in homes and businesses. Abu Zarin led a fire department King Cobra Squad, where he trained other firefighters to catch the deadly serpents.

A 10-year firefighting veteran, he showcased his snake-handling skills on “Asia's Got Talent” last year. His exploits are also widely documented on social media. However, the famed ‘snake whisperer’ died after he was bitten by a cobra. He was 33 years old.

Last year Dan Brandon, a snake lover in the U.K., was found suffocated to death near his pet python, “Tiny.” A coroner later said there was “no doubt” that the python had killed Brandon.

What is the moral of both stories? Never trust a snake.

Eve would have done well to heed that advice, but she succumbed to the serpents cunning, and as a result brought sin and death onto planet earth. But we're getting ahead of ourselves.

Where did Satan come from? If God created a perfect universe, how did evil arise? When did this battle between good and evil begin? And if you don't think a battle is raging, you only need to open your eyes to witness it being played out each and every day around you. It even rages within you.

This struggle, also known as the cosmic conflict or the great controversy, is the backdrop, the context in which we all live our lives. An understanding of the issues that surround this controversy clarifies how we ought to live, and brings into sharp focus our responsibilities for this hour. Everything we see and witness around us only makes sense when viewed through this background.

Sunday – The Fall Of A Perfect Being

Revelation 12:7-9; Isaiah 14:12-14; Revelation 13:1-4

If I were to tell you that war has broken out you might think that's not surprising. But this war, this battle between good and evil began long ago, not in the Middle East, Africa, or Europe. The Bible says that long ago there was war in heaven. And while that is hard to imagine, the war that began long ago in heaven is the war that implicates every last one of us.

Revelation 12:7, 9: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”

It's hard to imagine. **Why was Lucifer evicted from heaven?** Well, he wasn't always a devil. Let's find out why God found it necessary to evict the devil.

Isaiah 14:12-14: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.’ ” (cp. Ezek. 28:12-17)

The devil wanted to be in God's place. The devil had an “I” problem. Lucifer wanted a higher leadership position. He wanted to be ruler and to have dominion. Essentially, he wanted worship. That's where evil started. Keep that in mind, because although unsuccessful in heaven, he didn't change objectives when he came to earth. He still wants worship.

The cosmic battle involving the whole world is spearheaded by a jealous devil, seeking on earth what he failed to get in heaven. Now the conflict comes to a head in the book of Revelation.

Revelation 13:1-4. They follow beast (v. 3); they worship the dragon who gives power to beast (v. 4). Who is the dragon? The devil. In the last days he is determined to get the worship he couldn't get in heaven. (cp. Rev. 14:7, 9)

It is often asked, “Where did the sin that produced evil come from?” The answer is, “We just cannot know.” The Bible calls sin a “mystery” (2 Thess. 2:7). “Could...cause be shown for its existence, it would cease to be sin.” (The Great Controversy, p. 492, 493) We don't have to know it's beginning. We just need to know that God isn't to blame for it (think: free will), it is real (think: suffering, pain, and death), and that God has a plan to do away with it once and for all one day soon (think: close of the millennium).

Monday – More Than Head Knowledge

Genesis 3:1-7

Understand just how hung up the devil is on this. There he was in heaven, and why anybody would be unsatisfied with their lot in heaven is beyond me, but he was. He wanted to sit in God's place, and that wasn't going to fly. So he was evicted from heaven and came here to the earth. So what did he do?

Genesis 3:1-7. Quickly he went to Adam and Eve and got them on his side. The whole world followed him. Now there were only two people, but thy followed after the dragon. He said, "Has God said this, why don't you eat that", and they were just beguiled enough to go ahead and do it. So when he got to the earth he quickly established himself as the ruler of it.

The anatomy of deception. Deception in this context refers to a person who is led to ignore so much of what he or she already knows due to falling under the influence of words that are twisted, rearranged, added, or omitted. Once deceived, the victim behaves in an irrational manner. For example, Eve saw that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was pleasing to the eyes and good for food (Gen. 3:6), when in fact all the trees of the garden were "pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2:9).

What was being questioned in this dialogue between the serpent and Eve? God's character was being questioned in the insinuation that He was withholding something good from Eve. If that was the case then He couldn't be trusted. And if He couldn't be trusted, He couldn't be loved. Eve fell for it and she was doubly without excuse; one, for having fallen for his lies, and two, for having fallen for them as coming from the mouth of a serpent.

"Has God really said?" "You shall not surely die." This is the devil's classic attack on God's Word. He comes to people asking them whether God's Word can really be trusted in every respect. Then as he sees that he has our growing trust, he directly contradicts God's express word.

Illustration: In the Australian bush country grows a little plant called the "sundew." It has a slender stem and tiny, round leaves fringed with hairs that glisten with bright drops of liquid as delicate as fine dew. Although its attractive clusters of red, white, and pink blossoms are harmless, the leaves are deadly. The shiny moisture on each leaf is sticky and will imprison any bug that touches it. As an insect struggles to free itself, the vibration causes the leaves to close tightly around it. This innocent-looking plant then feeds on its victim.

The devil makes sin look attractive, but in the end it is deadly and impartial to its victims. Adam and Eve found that out all too late, and severe were the consequences. Let's be very clear about the devil's intentions. He wants us separated from God forever. Don't ever be fooled. But knowing this isn't enough to

protect us. What else is required? We need an abiding, trusting relationship with God. It was unbelief that led Eve to sin, and it can be the same for us too.

Tuesday – War In Heaven And On Earth

Matthew 4:1-11; Revelation 12:1-17

When Jesus came and lived on the earth as a man, the devil still wanted to win this battle between good and evil, and receive worship. **So what did he do?**

Matthew 4:1-11. After His baptism Jesus went into the wilderness where he fasted for 40 days. The devil saw Jesus at His low point and concluded that this was the time to get Him. So he tempted Him.

1st temptation – make stones bread. Response – “It is written, Man shall not...” (v. 4) **2nd temptation** – throw Himself off the temple. Response – “It is written, Thou shalt not tempt Lord thy God...” (v. 7) **3rd temptation** – Knowing Jesus was here to die to win back the entire world, he said to Jesus, “Bow down and worship me.” Jesus said, “It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.” (v. 10) That was strike three and the devil was out of there! But you see the devil was seeking worship, and he hasn’t let up on that. That’s his aim in these last days.

So when we read the prophecies of the Bible and try to understand last-day issue, we need to keep in mind the big picture; frame it within the context of this struggle. God is trying to get us back to the garden, back to that sin-free state that Adam and Eve enjoyed before they ate the fruit. On the other hand, there is an enemy, the devil, who is doing all he can to win over our allegiance.

Why do you think we’re seeing a rise in godlessness in the world? There is a battle raging. Satan is trying to lead people away from God. Why is there a growing casualness in Christianity? Same reason. Why is there a proliferation of destructive lifestyle habits? Same again. There’s a battle raging between good and evil.

Revelation 12:1-17. This chapter highlights the age-long struggle between Christ and Satan. They battled in heaven, but Lucifer was cast out. They battled on earth, but Satan was fully exposed for who he was when he inspired the crucifixion of Christ (however, Christ was and remains victorious). When Christ ascended to heaven to prepare a place for His faithful people, Satan turned his attention on the followers of Christ, and has saved his special deceptions for God’s last-day remnant church. But the devil doesn’t have to be victorious over us.

Wednesday – With You Always, Even Unto The End

Genesis 3:5; John 12:21, 32; Hebrews 13:5, 6; Romans 8:31-39

What does Christ’s victory on Calvary assures us of? It assures us of His enduring love for us, His faithfulness to us, and the promise of victory no matter what we

might face or what we might go through.

Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.” (cp. Rom. 16:20)

John 12:31, 32: “Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.”

Colossians 2:15: “Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.”

Hebrews 13:5, 6: “...For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear what can man do to me?’”

Matthew 10:28: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

Romans 8:31-39: “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Thursday - The Law And The Gospel

Revelation 14:12

At the heart of the great controversy is the character of God. The devil has slandered God’s good name. He has declared God to be exactly what he, the devil is—mean, nasty, and vindictive. Satan the accuser has declared that God is not love, that God cannot be trusted.

The written description of God’s character is summarized in His law—His law of love. God’s law then is also at the heart of this controversy. God’s law pronounces that we are sinners. We have broken God’s law and thus His heart. The wages of sin is death, therefore we have the death penalty hanging over our heads like the sword

of Damocles. Sin has separated us from God, the life source. **But how do we come back into harmony with God?**

Disobedience brought sin and death. “Nothing less than perfect obedience can meet the standard of God’s requirement.” (Temperance, p. 106) And it is at this point that the devil launches his attack on God’s law and His character. He says it’s impossible to keep God’s law and that His requirements are too high to attain to. How many, including Christians, have believed that devilish lie?

An equally insidious lie about God is that He won’t punish those who remain knowingly disobedient to His will. The wages of sin aren’t really death. Eat the fruit and you’ll be okay. God isn’t telling the truth. And where have we heard that before?

Is God going to keep us at arms length and not provide a way for us to come back into harmony with His law of love again? God has provided a way, and it’s magnificent.

Revelation 14:12: “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

Those who have heard, understood, and applied God’s last-day message of salvation, those who have faith in Christ’s substitutionary death for them, those who have believed that God writes His law on their hearts and in their minds by His Spirit, are declared to be God’s last-day commandment-keepers. They, by God’s grace, declare through their loving lives that the devil’s accusations aren’t true—that God’s law can be kept. This has nothing to do with legalism but everything to do with love for their Lord.

Appeal: We began our class referring to the tragic death of Abu Zarin, a snake “whisperer” who was bitten by a cobra that he got a little close to. He was 33 years old. Do you know else who died at 33 when He was “bitten” by a serpent (the Serpent)?

Jesus “heel” was “bruised” by the Serpent (Gen. 3:15) when He died in our stead. But He wouldn’t remain in the grave. He came forth from that grave a mighty conqueror over sin and death. His death was a blow to the head of the Serpent, the devil. It was fatal inasmuch that he could never recover from it. His power was weakened and his ultimate fate secured. The devil is a defeated foe due to the cross of Calvary.

The devil has no more power in your life, unless you want him to. He no longer has you in his clasp if your hand is in the hand of Christ. His spell no longer has effect in our lives if we have embraced Jesus. We don’t need to listen to the devil’s suggestions anymore and believe them. Let us trust God implicitly and never doubt Him again. What do you say?