

## **The Dragon's Unholy War**

*Revelation 12:13–17*

**Revelation 12:13–17** And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. 14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. 15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. 16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. 17 And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

### **Introduction**

The date you might not remember but the event changed the course of Christian Church history. On the evening of October 31, 1517 Martin Luther (an Augustinian Monk) who had been a teaching professor at a seminary in Wittenberg, Germany, posted on the church doors (the church “bulletin board”) his now famous 95 Theses. These 95 theses were grievances which Luther had against the Roman Catholic Church over the sale of indulgences. The church was selling indulgences to gain riches off of the sensitive souls of the people.

Luther was one of those sensitive souls. He was tormented with an almost obsessive nature over his sinfulness. He believed that he could never earn the righteousness necessary to be in the presence of God. And while lecturing through the book of Romans he came to realize that the righteousness necessary to stand before the face of God was not one in which we as humans could achieve. No amount of merit could earn the righteousness we needed. Rather, he read the phrase “the just shall live by faith” and as it were the light was turned on. He later wrote about this experience:

“Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by his faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us through faith. Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on a new meaning, and whereas before the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in greater love. This passage of Paul became to me a gate to heaven.” (cited in Bainton, *Here I Stand* [2009], p. 48)

Luther would later be a champion (amongst many others) of the Reformation of the Church. And of course, Luther would write several hymns, perhaps the most famous being “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Several lines from that magisterial hymn are pertinent both to our text today as well as to the life of Luther and his recovery of the one true gospel: *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!*

Luther understood that the “Prince of Darkness” can rage in many ways: he can rage with intense persecution like was seen in the early church and in some parts of the world today;

he can rage through his appeals to our inclination to sin; and he can rage in concealing the only source of hope we have as humans—the gospel of Jesus Christ. For years and years the gospel had been hidden by the Roman Catholic Church behind the false teaching that humans have basic goodness within them; that the way to God was through various means of grace (meritorious because of the goodness of the deed itself). Luther understood that the teachings of the Holy Scriptures is that righteousness is found in Jesus Christ alone. Satan wishes to conceal that source of hope from the world for he is, after all, the god of this world who blinds the minds of humans.

**2 Corinthians 4:3–4** But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The rage of the Evil One against the ones upon whom God has set His affection could not be emphasized enough. Satan from the very beginning of his rebellious heart has hated and denied the glory which alone belongs to Holy God. Yet though Satan may rage, we as Christians must remember that we can *endure the rage of the Evil One for his doom is sure because of the work of Jesus Christ.*

There are two realities which our text reminds us concerning the attacks of the Devil and the response of the Lord: (1) Satan rages with vehemence against the children upon whom the Lord has set His affection, and yet in spite of the Slanderer's redoubled efforts (2) God with unwavering resolve will preserve His faithful remnant until the final judgment day.

### **I. Satan Rages against the faithful.**

The three main characters in our text today are the Dragon, the Woman, and the Lord.

*The Dragon.* The antagonist of this heavenly drama is the Evil One, Satan, the Slanderer (cf. 12:9). He knows that his time to destroy and defile the creatures which the King of Heaven made is but short (12:12). When he sees that he is cast to the earth by the decree of the Omnipotent God he rages. Like a lion roaring in anger, Satan rages against the object of the King's affection: the Woman. The word which the KJV renders "persecute" is an excellent rendering of the Greek word. Satan pours out the intense hatred he has for the Holy One and turns it upon the woman. When the woman flees into the wilderness the serpent of old "cast water out of his mouth as a flood" (v. 15). What exactly this "flood" symbolism represents I cannot tell. What I can say is Satan will literally stop at nothing to destroy the woman. His anger with the woman (v. 17) extends toward the descendants of the woman (more on them later).

*The Woman.* The Woman (as Pastor Dickson has already preached on in previous messages) is a symbol of the one to whom the Lord has betrothed Himself: Israel. The woman has not been faithful to her husband and has played out the very illustration of Hosea: she has left her first love and filled herself with the loves of the world. The one through whom the Messiah came has rejected Jesus and lives in darkness even until now. Nevertheless the affection of the Lord still is on display toward the rebel wife and one day will be fully realized and enjoyed by her in the future.

*The Lord.* The Lord God of Heaven ultimately is the One against Whom Satan rages. He hates God and therefore will stop at nothing to attack God through His beloved creatures. The

confession of the descendants of the woman is that they “keep the commandments of God” and “have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (v. 17). The Lord clearly is the one to whom these descendants cling. Their hope is not in their shrewd ability to persuade earthly authorities to enact vengeance against the Serpent. Their hope is not in the thought that they will overcome the Evil One with their own resolve and determination. Their hope is solely in the God who preserves His faithful remnant.

## **II. God Preserves His faithful.**

Though Satan may rage with intense hatred nevertheless his rage has an expiration date. And though he may rage with powerful anger his might is limited by the sovereign hand of Almighty God. The Lord preserves His faithful remnant. He will not leave His people without a shelter in the time of storm. There are three ways in which the Lord preserves His faithful children.

*Miraculous Means.* We find in our text today that when Satan rages against the woman she is rescued by several miraculous means. First, she is given two great wings like the wings of an eagle which carry her away swiftly into the wilderness (v. 14). There she is preserved by the hand of God of which Jesus said “no man can pluck them out of my hand.” Second, when she runs from the onslaught of the Evil One she is faced with an overwhelming flood sent from the mouth of the dragon but in true miraculous form the Lord uses the earth to save the woman.

Let this point not be underemphasized. The creation groans and travails now under the weight of the curse. But when it’s Master commands it obeys. When Korah rebelled against Moses and against the Lord what happened but the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up (cf. Numbers 16:1ff). When the Egyptians were perusing the Israelites across the Red Sea what happened? The Red Sea parted and the Israelites crossed on dry ground. When they had passed through the Lord caused the sea to crash down and destroy the army of the Pharaoh—swallowing up the enemies of God’s people (Exodus 14:1ff). And when the Messiah finally came to the earth what did he do? Command the winds and waves to obey Him.

**Matthew 8:23–27** And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. 24 And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. 25 And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. 26 And he saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. 27 But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!

When the winds and waves arose that were so fierce it caused experienced, seasoned fisherman to fear and quake, Christ the protector arose and rebuked the winds and waves so that they obeyed His voice. When John writes about the earth opening its mouth to swallow the attacks of the Dragon it should come as no surprise that the creation obeys its Master to preserve the woman in the wilderness. The Lord will use miraculous means to preserve His faithful ones when the onslaught of the Devil is at its fiercest. Take heart, dear Christian.

*Limited Time.* The wonderful part of Scripture is that though it tells us of woes and the sorrows of sin, nevertheless evil will not reign forever. There is an appointed time when one day the sadness and sorry we experience in life will be over! Satan does not have an endless time to

commit his atrocities. There is a time when he will be vanquished *forever*. Even when he is at his fiercest John records for us that the woman will only have to be hidden and cared for in the wilderness for “times, time, and half a time” (v. 14) often believed to be the latter half of the three and a half year tribulational period. Satan has but a short time. And one day there will be a day of judgment in which the Evil One will be vanquished completely and finally—forever.

**Revelation 20:10** And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Praise the Lord that though Satan has power as the prince of darkness grim, yet is his power limited in both might and duration and one day “one little word shall fell him!”

*Persevering Confession.* The final and perhaps most important way in which the Lord preserves His faithful remnant is through their persevering confession. Here we find that those who obey the Lord and believe the gospel message (i.e., keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ, v. 17) are the object of the Dragon’s specific attention. These children are the descendants of the woman and have embraced the true Gospel of God. Notice that the gospel is to be obeyed and embraced. The call of the gospel is not an arbitrary one or an empty one. All who embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ will receive the particular attention of Satan. The intensity of the attacks of Satan might cause even the elect to wonder if they will persevere in faith. Take heart in this passage which the Apostle Peter wrote for us:

**1 Peter 1:3–9** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: 7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: 8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: 9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

There could be no greater joy we can receive from our Lord: though the attacks of Satan are intense, we have a faithful High Priest who is protecting our faith! Just as the Lord prayed for the faith and endurance of Peter so does He now intercede for us before the Father. Beloved, let us hold fast to these truths! Though the attacks of Satan are fierce, *endure the rage of the Evil One for his doom is sure because of the work of Jesus Christ.*

*Soli Deo Gloria!*