

INTRODUCTION

This verse-by-verse study in Hebrews is all about the Superiority of Jesus. That's why we're calling it "Eyes on Jesus." In this message we're going to see how Jesus conquered both the devil and death. They are interrelated. I could have easily entitled this message "The Day Death and the Devil were Destroyed." That's a lot of D's.

Death is a part of life. As long as the Lord tarries, every living thing eventually dies. During my senior year of college I served as Youth Pastor at First Baptist Church, Prattville, Alabama, where Kevin Burdette grew up. On weekends, Cindy and I lived in a mobile home on the farm of one of the church families. They had a son named Richard who was about five or six. He was my buddy. Richard and I were out walking their pasture together one day and we came up on a dead horse. I have forgotten the horse's name, but for the sake of the story I'll call him Bingo. Richard was fascinated at the sight of Bingo lying there dead. He turned to me and said, "What happened to Bingo?"

In all of my wisdom, I tried to give him my very best theological statement about death and heaven. So I knelt down and said, "Richard, Bingo has gone to be with Jesus." I'll never forget his reply. He scrunched up his nose and said, "What's Jesus going to do with a dead horse?"

I guess I didn't do a very good job explaining death to Richard that day. I hope to do a better job today explaining what the Bible has to say about death and dying.

Hebrews 2:14-18. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

The second part of this passage talks about Jesus as our High Priest. I'm not going to address that topic until we get to Hebrews 4, because there's a lot more detailed truth about Jesus as our High Priest. Instead we're going to focus on those powerful words that speak of how Jesus destroyed the devil on the day He died on the cross. Of course, the devil is still around causing misery. The word translated destroyed is *kata-argos*, which literally means "take down." In the world of professional wrestling, which is an oxymoron, by the way, we would call it a smackdown. So, let's learn about Satan's smackdown and what it means for us today.

1. AS THE AUTHOR OF SIN, THE DEVIL CREATED THE FEAR OF DEATH

There is a connection between sin and death. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."

God placed Adam and Eve in a perfect environment and in Genesis 2 He said, "Take charge. Be fruitful and multiply. Enjoy all the fruit of the garden except one tree. Don't eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The day you eat that fruit, you will die."

Satan confronted Eve and put a question mark where God put a period, and he misquoted God's warning. He said, "Did God really say that you can't eat from ANY tree in the garden?" Satan is still twisting God's words. Then the serpent said in Genesis 3:4, "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:4-5)

And we all know what happened. Eve ate the fruit and gave some to Adam. Which gives rise to the world's shortest poem. The poem is entitled, "Troubles." It goes "Troubles. Adam had'em."

But wait. They didn't die, did they? Remember that God created man in His own image. God is a tri-unity and He made people as a tri-unity: body, soul, and spirit. The day Adam and Eve sinned, they died immediately in spirit. In other words, they lost their innocence and their intimacy with their Creator. They died progressively in their soul, and they died ultimately in their bodies. Before there was sin, there was no death.

But when sin entered the world, shame entered the world and then death followed. When Adam and Eve experienced shame, they made clothes of fig leaves to cover their nakedness and then they hid from God. When God showed up he said, "Adam, where are you?" God knew where they were; He wanted them to admit what they had done. He said, "Adam what have you done?" That's when the shame turned into the blame game. Adam said, "It's not MY fault. It was the woman YOU made, she gave me the fruit." Then Eve said, "It's not MY fault. The serpent deceived me." In other words, Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on. Literally.

Jesus pointed out the evil nature of Satan's character. He said, "He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44) Jesus called Satan a thief in John 10. He said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they might have life." (John 10:10) So before the devil showed up, there was no sin and no death.

Charles Spurgeon was one of the most famous English Baptist preachers of the 19th Century. He was called as pastor of a church in London at age 19 and pastored there for 38 years until he died at age 57. He often preached to a congregation of 10,000 people. There are two interesting points of trivia about Spurgeon. First, he enjoyed a cigar every night. He said he smoked it to the glory of God. Second, he struggled with depression and often had to spend months in the South of France to recover from what he called "the dark night of the soul."

I love to read Spurgeon's sermons, but they are from an age of such flowery eloquence, that I don't quote him that much. But in December of 1857 he preached a message from this text in Hebrews entitled "The Destroyer Destroyed." Here's how he describes Satan's connection with death: "Death is Satan's delight. He conceives death to be his masterpiece, because of its terror,

and because of the ruin which it works. No doubt he gloats over our sicknesses; but death is to him a theme of as much delight as he can be capable of in his eternal misery. He, as far as he can, shouts for joy when he witnesses how, by one piece of treachery, he swept the world with the broom of destruction, and hurried all men to the tomb. Never was his malicious heart so full of hellish joy as when he saw Abel stretched upon the earth, slain by the club of his brother. 'Aha!' said Satan, 'this is the first of all intelligent creatures that has died. Oh how I rejoice! This is the crowning hour of my dominion!'"

From the time sin and death entered the human equation until the cross, people have known they were going to die and it caused them to fear. But something happened on the cross that changed everything.

2. WHEN JESUS DIED, HE DISARMED THE POWER OF THE DEVIL

In 1972 Hal Lindsey wrote a book entitled *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth*. He was correct about Satan being alive, but he was wrong about Satan being well. He's alive, but he hasn't been well since the day Jesus died. That's the day Jesus gave Satan his spiritual smackdown.

Here's what the Bible says happened the day Jesus was crucified. "He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."
(Colossians 2:14-15)

Those powers and authorities that were disarmed and publically shamed were the devil and his demons. As a fallen angel, Lucifer knew the reason Jesus took on flesh and came to planet earth. Back in the Garden of Eden, God had predicted Satan's ultimate doom. God said to the serpent: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he [Jesus who was born of a woman] will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15) So from the time Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Satan was there, striking at the heel of Jesus, trying to kill him. When he saw him as an infant in a manger, he stirred up the jealousy of Herod the Great to kill all the boy babies in Bethlehem. But God sent an angel to warn Joseph to flee with the baby Jesus to Egypt.

When Jesus had fasted for forty days in the desert, Satan came to confront Him to try to get Him to throw Himself off the pinnacle of the Temple, but Jesus resisted. Satan tried again the day Jesus spoke at His home synagogue in Nazareth. Satan stirred up the crowd to grab Jesus and drag Him to a cliff to throw Him off to His death. But as the serpent continually struck at the heel of Jesus, it was not yet a fatal blow. Then Satan entered Judas Iscariot and motivated him to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. I'm sure Satan and his demons laughed with glee as they observed the arrest, trial and torture of Jesus.

Satan must have been thrilled when they nailed Jesus to the cross. "At last!" He shouted. "I have killed the seed of woman!" And when Jesus cried, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" Satan's forces cheered as if victory was theirs. But then as He bore the sins of the

world, which included the penalty of death, Jesus said, "*Tetelestai!*" "It is finished!" Stomp. Stomp! Stomp! In essence, Jesus was saying, "Satan, YOU are finished!"

That's when Satan started worrying. They put Jesus in the tomb. One day. Satan, the author of death said, "Stay dead!" Two days. "Stay Dead!" Three days. "Christ the Lord is risen today, Hallelujah!" And the devil's power of death was totally destroyed.

In His death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus ripped the stinger out of death, and he robbed the grave of its victory. Now we proclaim, "Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory?" Oh, Satan is alive. But he hasn't been well since Calvary. He was shamed, slammed, smacked down at the cross!

3. AS A DEFEATED ENEMY, SATAN STILL TRIES TO INFLICT DAMAGE

By this point, you may be thinking again. Pastor, if the devil was destroyed, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world today? As a defeated foe, Satan is trying to cause as much misery as he can because he knows his days are numbered.

During World War II, after the battle of Leningrad was lost, it became clear to the Nazis that the war on the Eastern Front was lost. So Hitler ordered what has been called the "scorched earth policy." As the Nazis retreated, they destroyed everything that might be useful to their enemies. This scorched earth policy was particularly brutal in the Ukraine. In 1943 SS Commander Heinrich Himmler issued the following order: "to leave behind in Ukraine not a single person, no cattle, not a field of grain, not a railroad track. The country must be left totally burned and destroyed." Nazi soldiers tore up railroad tracks, burned thousands of towns, and even gathered citizens in churches and then burned the churches to the ground.

In the same way, the devil knows that he is a defeated foe, and he is trying to cause as much damage as he can until the end. So we still have to be aware of his strategy. The Apostle Peter wrote these words of warning, "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Since the cross, the devil has been a toothless lion, but he still tries to make you miserable. Lions aren't the fastest animals in the jungle, so they have to sneak up on their prey. In the same way, the devil is sneaky in the way he attacks believers. He often disguises himself as an angel of light. Lions roar to paralyze their prey with fear. In the same way, fear is still one of Satan's greatest tools. He roams and he roars, but he can't touch you without God's permission, so don't fear him.

Jack Taylor used to be the pastor of Castle Hills Baptist Church in San Antonio. His teaching and writings have had a great impact on my life. He published a little book entitled *Victory Over the Devil* in which he wrote: "Satan's defeat did not remove him from the picture. He is still very much with us. His past defeat assures Christ present domination over him. He is vanquished,

but not vanished; present but not prevailing; active but not able to overcome us. Satan is being crushed in the battlefields of this world where believers have learned the truth about their enemy being a defeated foe." (*Victory Over the Devil*, p. 91)

One of Satan's most effective strategies is to remind of your past failures and sins. The Bible calls him the accuser of the brothers and sisters. Even though your sin has been forgiven, he continually tries to remind you of how wicked and evil you used to be.

At one time Lucifer was an angel in heaven. He wanted to promote himself to the throne of God. He thought, 'I'm going up, up, up.' But God said, "You're going down, down, down." Satan lost his position as a holy angel, but he still had access to God according to Job 1. But in Revelation 12 we learn that Satan will be kicked out of heaven. And he will keep on going down, down, down because in Revelation 20 we see Satan's final address: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." (Revelation 20:10)

The next time the devil tries to remind you of your past, remind him of his future!

CONCLUSION

So what does all this mean, what's the Take-Away Truth? Because the devil was disarmed at the cross, WE CAN FACE DEATH WITHOUT FEAR.

We can be like the Apostle Paul who once wrote these words in prison: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21)

If you don't know the Lord, death should be a scary thought to you. For anyone who has rejected God's free gift of eternal life, death means an appointment with hell. And I would do anything I could to scare the hell out of you, or to scare you out of hell. Your only hope for heaven is to place your faith in Jesus Christ. Bertram Russell was a famous British academic and writer, but he wasn't a Christian. In 1927 he wrote a book *Why I am not a Christian*. When he was 81 years old BBC interviewed him. The interviewer asked him, "What do you have to hang onto when death is obviously so close?" Listen to his answer. Russell replied, "I have nothing to hang onto but grim, unyielding despair." And he lived to be 97. After he spoke those words, he had sixteen more years of grim, unyielding despair. Compare that to the believers we know who have recently died. Whether they were in hospice or at home, they looked forward to leaving a frail body and entering into the joyful presence of God. Paul said, "To me to live is Christ—that's good. And for me to die, that's gain, even better. I've said it before, but for a Christian, it's head's I win, tails I win. If I live, it's Jesus, the serving, following, and glorifying Jesus. But to die is even better, it's gain. Heads I win; tails I win!"

So what does a Christian gain at death? We gain the physical presence of Jesus. Now we see Jesus with eyes of faith, like looking through a fogged up window, but then face to face. We'll gain the fellowship of all the saints who have gone on before us. Of course, we'll be restored with our loved ones who died in the Lord, but we'll also meet people we've only read about. I

can't wait to ask David why he picked up five stones when he approached Goliath that day. I want to ask Moses what it's like to lead a group of griping people in the desert for forty years. I want to ask Esther what it was like to be the first beauty queen.

Let me mention one more thing we'll gain at death: At death, we gain freedom from pain and sickness. I've watched too many people suffer and die. The older we get, the more aches and pains we get. Some of you live with severe pain every day of your life. Some of you live with disabilities and struggles that make physical life difficult. At death, you gain freedom from that.

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Everybody is living for something or someone. I want you to fill in a blank for me, and I want you to be brutally honest with yourself. Don't give me a preacher answer, because I don't want you to answer out loud. You might as well be honest, because God already knows how you're going to fill in this blank.

Here it is: For me, to live is _____. What are you living for? Money? Success? Popularity? Pleasure? Give it the four T test. What do THINK about the most? What do you TALK about the most? Where do you invest the most TIME? And where do you invest most of your TREASURE. That's probably what fills in your blank.

Fill in your blank. But if you put anyone or anything else in the blank except Jesus you must finish the statement by saying, "And to die is LOSS." If you put money in the blank, to die is loss. If you put pleasure in the blank, to die is loss. Even if you put something as noble as my family, or my nation, to die is loss.

I don't know if you caught the breaking news about the latest tragedy that happened yesterday in the U.S. Did you hear about the 7,100 Americans who died? That's how many die every day. That's almost 300 every hour. Some die in hospitals, some die in hospices, some die at home and some die on the highways, but every day over 7,000 Americans go into eternity. But when you can say to me to live is Christ, then you can say to die is gain. There should be no fear. We're going home. We're going to see Jesus. Remember my friend, for a Christian, we live in the land of the dying and we are going to the land of the living!

My friend, if can honestly say, "For to me, to live is Christ," then you can also say, "To die is gain." The devil's power to scare people with the threat of dying was destroyed at the cross, so rejoice today that we have VICTORY in Jesus!

OUTLINE

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Satan's character:

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"He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." *Colossians 2:14-15*

Satan's doom predicted:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." *Genesis 3:15*

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Satan's final address:

"And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever." *Revelation 20:10*

TAKE-AWAY TRUTH:

We can face death without fear!

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes