

# DANGEROUS TERRITORY

By Rev. Will Nelken

*Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, February 19, 2017*

---

A digest of recent news captures these headlines:

- A stock market correction appears imminent
- ISIS and terrorism are still a major threat
- Global economic recession is on the horizon
- Ebola is still a concern in Africa
- College tuition fee hikes are likely
- Powerful storms batter California

It appears that the world is not a safe place. Well, that's not news. Jesus knew it.

On His final night with His disciples before His execution, Jesus prayed to the Father in their presence. One of His requests regarding His followers was this:

*John 17:15 I'm not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.*

Do you believe the Father hears and answers when Jesus prays? I do. And this prayer has left a lasting impression on me. Jesus prayed, so I am safe—safe from the wiles of the evil one. That doesn't mean I am not vulnerable to his lies, but if I lean on Jesus I will be safe.

So, what is the power that Satan has. Why is he so bitterly opposed to Jesus and His people?

## **Proud Origin**

Ezekiel hints at the origin of Satan, the evil one.

*Ezekiel 28:11 Then this further message came to me from the Lord: <sup>12</sup> "Son of man, sing this funeral song for the king of Tyre. Give him this message from the Sovereign Lord:*

*"You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and exquisite in beauty. <sup>13</sup> You were in Eden, the garden of God. Your clothing was adorned with every precious stone—red carnelian, pale-green peridot, white moonstone, blue-green beryl, onyx, green jasper, blue lapis lazuli, turquoise, and emerald—all beautifully crafted for you and set in the finest gold. They were given to you on the day you were created. <sup>14</sup> I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God and walked among the stones of fire.*

*<sup>15</sup> "You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you. <sup>16</sup> Your rich commerce led you to violence, and you sinned. So I banished you in*

*disgrace from the mountain of God. I expelled you, O mighty guardian, from your place among the stones of fire. <sup>17</sup> Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor. So I threw you to the ground and exposed you to the curious gaze of kings.*

Once an angelic creature of high esteem, pride brought this giant down. His beauty and wisdom could not save him. Isaiah elaborates on his downfall.

## **Proud Assertions**

*Isaiah 14:12* “How you are fallen from heaven, O shining star, son of the morning! You have been thrown down to the earth, you who destroyed the nations of the world. <sup>13</sup> For you said to yourself, ‘I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God’s stars. I will preside on the mountain of the gods far away in the north. <sup>14</sup> I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High.’ <sup>15</sup> Instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead, down to its lowest depths. <sup>16</sup> Everyone there will stare at you and ask, ‘Can this be the one who shook the earth and made the kingdoms of the world tremble? <sup>17</sup> Is this the one who destroyed the world and made it into a wasteland?’

Your will can be your greatest asset or your greatest liability! Lucifer (aka Satan) said, “I will ascend. I will preside. I will climb. I will be like the Most High.” But God said, “You will be brought down.”

Satan revealed a huge misunderstanding of the nature of God and godliness: He thought ascension would lead to presiding. He thought he could climb to the position of the Most High. However, God did not *become* God. He was God before anything else existed. Nothing exists that He did not make. He was/is/will be God eternally.

Neither can you climb your way into heaven or to a position of godliness. It is not reached by human effort or contrivance. It is received by faith because of God’s grace.

By the way, human righteousness and religion will not exempt you from hardship in this world. Jesus said, “*Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*” (John 16:33) Your shield against the hardness of life is *your faith*.

## **On a Short Leash**

For some real “behind the scenes” insight into the limits of Satan’s power, read from the story of Job:

*Job 1:6* One day the members of the heavenly court came to present themselves before the Lord, and the Accuser, Satan, came with them. <sup>7</sup> “Where have you come from?” the Lord asked Satan. Satan answered the Lord, “I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that’s going on.”

<sup>8</sup> Then the Lord asked Satan, “Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil.”

<sup>9</sup> Satan replied to the Lord, “Yes, but Job has good reason to fear God. <sup>10</sup> You have always put a wall of protection around him and his home and his property. You have made him prosper in everything he does. Look how rich he is! <sup>11</sup> But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse You to your face!”

<sup>12</sup> “All right, you may test him,” the Lord said to Satan. “Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don’t harm him physically.” So Satan left the Lord’s presence.

(God trusted Job, and He entrusted him with a great trial. God gave Satan license to harm Job’s stuff, but not to harm Job himself. So, in one day, Satan destroyed all that he owned, including his flocks, his servants, his house, and his children.)

*Job 1:20* Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship. <sup>21</sup> He said, “I came naked from my mother’s womb, and I will be naked when I leave. The Lord gave me what I had, and the Lord has taken it away. Praise the name of the Lord!”

<sup>22</sup> In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God.

*Job 2:1* One day the members of the heavenly court came again to present themselves before the Lord, and the Accuser, Satan, came with them. <sup>2</sup> “Where have you come from?” the Lord asked Satan.

Satan answered the Lord, “I have been patrolling the earth, watching everything that’s going on.”

<sup>3</sup> Then the Lord asked Satan, “Have you noticed my servant Job? He is the finest man in all the earth. He is blameless—a man of complete integrity. He fears God and stays away from evil. And he has maintained his integrity, even though you urged me to harm him without cause.”

<sup>4</sup> Satan replied to the Lord, “Skin for skin! A man will give up everything he has to save his life.

<sup>5</sup> But reach out and take away his health, and he will surely curse You to your face!”

<sup>6</sup> “All right, do with him as you please,” the Lord said to Satan. “But spare his life.” <sup>7</sup> So Satan left the Lord’s presence, and he struck Job with terrible boils from head to foot.

<sup>8</sup> Job scraped his skin with a piece of broken pottery as he sat among the ashes. <sup>9</sup> His wife said to him, “Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die.”

<sup>10</sup> But Job replied, “You talk like a foolish woman. Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?” So in all this, Job said nothing wrong.

(This time, God let Satan touch Job physically, but protected Job’s life. And after nine agonizing months, when Job prayed for his friends, God restored Job’s fortunes, twice as great as before

his trial, and gave him seven more sons and three more daughters. He lived 140 years, and saw four generations of his children and grandchildren.)

## **Kept Safe**

In light of this record, and our present circumstances, how significant was Jesus' prayer!

*John 17:15 I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.*

We are living in dangerous territory. But the story of Job teaches us that our physical dangers are not the most significant we will face. Our faith is under siege.

With everything that is in you, nurture and preserve your faith in Christ, which is the seedbed of your hope, for this life and the next.

## **How Shall We Pray?**

Pity those who have *no faith* in Him!

*2 Corinthians 4:3 If the Good News we preach is hidden behind a veil, it is hidden only from people who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God.*

Indifference to the message of Christ is not the same as resistance.

Indifference is a condition of blindness, for which we may pray. For those you may know who are indifferent to matters of faith, pray that their blindness be healed, that their minds be opened to the message about Jesus Christ.

For those who are resistant—whether because of pride or fear—pray that their stubbornness be broken and washed away.

And then, there are those who have faith in Jesus Christ, who have been born of the Spirit, yet still battle with the flesh and its desires (and that's all of us, in varying degrees). Jesus showed us how to pray for them, too.

*Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers."*

For those who have lived by faith, but have encountered loss and pain and grief, pray that they would not give up their faith, that they would not cast it aside as if worthless.

Pray for one another frequently. Let God's Word direct you. And use your own life's battles as a guide. Pray for others as you would pray for yourself. Pray that, no matter what, their faith would not cave in, that they would not give up, that they would run this race to win.