

Evil & The Gospel

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[0 : 00] Living God, we thank you that you got a hold of Matthew, the tax collector, and you enabled him to remember these events and write them down for us.

And now we pray in your mercy and grace that you would help us understand what we have read. And even if we cannot understand, that you would help us actually live in the reality, the good news that is being declared in these texts.

In this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank God for the gospel.

The biblical word is euangelion, from which we get the English words evangel, evangelical, evangelize. Gospel. It means good news, not just good advice.

Yes, we do need good advice. And the gospel gives it. Good advice like, walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

[1 : 09] Good advice like, do not be anxious for tomorrow. Good advice like, do not let any root of bitterness grow up in you. Good advice like, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you.

Great good advice. If we could just live that good advice, the world would be transformed tomorrow. The problem is, the good advice is impossible to live without the good news.

Which is why the New Testament never gives us any good advice without first grounding it in the good news. I have good news for you today.

Jesus of Nazareth has changed the way the universe goes together. If you don't hear anything else, hear that. Jesus of Nazareth has changed the way the universe goes together.

Through his death, resurrection, and ascension, the structures of reality have been altered. And altered in a direction that charms our fears and bids our sorrows cease, as an old hymn puts it.

[2 : 22] Before Jesus dies on the cross and is raised from the tomb, reality is configured one way. After Jesus dies on the cross and is raised from the tomb, reality is configured in another way.

When he comes again in all of his glory, it will be reconfigured in yet another way. Before the invention of television, people lived one way.

After the invention of television, people lived another way. Before the internet, the world went together one way. After the internet, the world goes together in another way.

I've suggested the past two Sundays that we look at reality with a capital R as though it were a giant cobweb. And I've suggested that we can give names to the threads and the strands that make up this cobweb.

Names like water, air, fire, earth. Names like gravity, electromagnetism, nuclear energy. And names like sin, evil, and death.

[3 : 32] The enemies of life. Before the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, sin, evil, and death were woven into reality one way.

After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, sin, evil, and death are woven in reality in another way. The structures of reality have been altered forever in the direction of setting captives free.

Especially setting captives free from fear in the face of evil. By the word evil, I mean what the New Testament means.

More than human meanness and madness. By the word evil, I mean the personal embodiment of evil.

Whom Jesus faces right after the beginning of his ministry. Before the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, evil was present and at work in human life one way.

[4 : 41] After the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth, evil is present and at work in a different way. We are talking about really, really good news.

In the text we just read from the Gospel according to Matthew, we are taken to two mountains. One before the cross and empty tomb, and the other after the cross and empty tomb.

Before, Matthew 4, Jesus is on a mountain with the evil one. Satan, as he calls him, claims that all the kingdoms of the world, all the nations of the world belong to him.

And he offers to give the nations to Jesus if Jesus will simply bow down and worship him. Mountain, nations, worship. After, Matthew 28, Jesus is on a mountain again, this time with his disciples.

Making this cosmic claim, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. And Jesus releasing his disciples to go make disciples of the nations.

[5 : 54] Mountain, nations, worship. Between these two mountains, Matthew records many of the deeds of Jesus. Where Jesus comes into the world, he heals all kinds of sickness, and he begins to set people free from all forms of evil.

And then right in the middle, Jesus gives his own interpretation of these deeds. He gives us the parable about a strong man. Jesus says that for a long time, a strong man had been holding humanity captive.

But now a stronger man has come, has bound the strong man, and is beginning to plunder his house. Altered structures of reality.

The way the universe goes together has changed in the direction of setting us free from fear in the face of evil. Now, I'm keenly aware that what I'm going to develop for the next 20 minutes or so does not square with the prevailing worldview.

I'm keenly aware of that. I'm keenly aware that what I'm going to develop for 20 minutes is actually offensive to the prevailing worldview. What I'm going to do is I'm simply going to tell the story of the two mountains.

[7 : 11] Many of you know it well. Some of you have never heard it. And all of us need to know it well. So, go back to the first mountain. Matthew tells us that the devil shows Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, all the nations, and says to Jesus, all these things I'll give to you if you just bow down and worship me.

Luke records the additional claim, for this dominion was handed over to me and I give it to whomever I wish. See them, Jesus?

All the kingdoms of the world, China, India, Rome, and all her conquered kingdoms, Greece, Pergamos, Bithynia, Pontus, Egypt, Judea. See them all, Jesus?

All the nations of the world that disobey your father. All the nations of the world, Jesus. I hold them in my grip and they can be all yours if you just fall down and worship me.

Now, in order to understand this temptation, and therefore understand what happened between these two mountains, we need to remember that this temptation on the first mountain takes place right after Jesus' baptism.

[8 : 24] What an experience that was for Jesus. At his baptism, Jesus sees the heavens open and the Spirit of God descend upon him as a dove.

And Jesus hears a voice from heaven, the Father's voice, saying to him, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. It's important to note that there are two parts to the Father's speech. This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.

And both parts of the Father's speech echo critical text of the Old Testament. The first part, This is my beloved Son, echoes Psalm 2.

Psalm 2 is called the Royal Psalm because in it, God the Father addresses his Son to whom the Father is going to give all the nations of the world. Why are the nations in an uproar?

[9 : 28] The peoples devising a vain thing. The kings of the earth take their stand. The rulers take counsel against Yahweh and his Messiah, saying, Let us tear their fetters apart and cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens laughs. Yahweh scoffs at them and says, But as for me, I have installed my king upon Zion, my holy mountain. And the king says, I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh.

He said to me, You are my son. Today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance. The very ends of the earth is your possession. Son gets the nations.

And at his baptism, Jesus knows that he is this beloved Son of God who comes as the anointed king over all the nations.

The second part of the Father's speech at Jesus' baptism, with whom I am well pleased, echoes the words of Isaiah 42. Isaiah 42, verses 1 to 4, is the first of four songs Isaiah records where Yahweh sings about his coming servant.

[10:39] Behold my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom my soul delights. I have put my spirit upon him and he will bring forth justice to the nations. My servant, nations.

And at his baptism, Jesus knows that he is God's anointed servant who comes for the sake of the nations. And Jesus knows where this all goes.

Because Jesus knows that this first song in Isaiah builds upon a number of other songs culminating in the fourth song recorded in Isaiah 52 and 53.

Behold my servant will prosper. He will be high and lifted up. He will be greatly exalted. Kings will shut their mouths on account of him. And how is this servant to reach such an exalted place among the nations?

Isaiah continues, He was despised and forsaken, a man of suffering, acquainted with grief. All of us like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way.

[11:43] But Yahweh has called the iniquity of us all to fall on him. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. So at his baptism, Jesus accepts this two-fold call.

As the Father's Son to be the anointed king over the nations and as God's servant to redeem the nations by taking on the sin of the nations.

At his baptism, Jesus already knows that the nations will ultimately be given to him as his inheritance. And he knows that he will gain this inheritance by redeeming the nations through substitutionary sacrifice.

That is, Jesus knows he will gain the crown by going through the cross. Are you with me? Now you can see what's going on in the first mountain.

Satan says, I will give you all the nations of the world if you just bow down and worship me. Satan is offering Jesus a way to fulfill the first part of his baptismal call without having to fulfill the second part.

[12:58] Satan is offering Jesus a way to be king without having to be the suffering servant. Evil is offering Jesus a way to the crown that avoids the cross.

It's very tempting. I have the nations in my grasp. I have peoples and governments in my grip. I will loosen the grip. I will relinquish control.

I will transfer my authority over the nations to you. Just fall down and worship me. That's all. You can set the captives free without the agony of the cross. The nations, Jesus, all of them.

They're yours. Just worship me. The question is, could Satan have delivered on the deal? That is, were the nations of the world, were the kingdoms of the world in his grip?

In Luke's version of the temptation, Satan claims the nations were handed over to him. Handed over to him by whom? By God?

[14:05] By God? Would the living God have handed the nations of the world over to the power of evil? The answer is, no and yes.

No. God would not and did not transfer ownership and sovereignty to the evil one. But God has given nations and individuals free choice.

and God honors the free choice people make and he justly gives the consequences of those free choices. Whether we realize it or not, when human beings, individually or nationally, choose not to bow down and worship the true and living God, we inevitably fall under the influence and grip of evil.

If we will not walk in the light, God lets us have the darkness we have chosen. God lets us fall under the deceptive spell of the prince of darkness. If we will not walk in the truth, God will let us have the lie we have chosen and we come under the spell of the Lord of lies.

Which means that we humans handed over the nations to the evil one. We did not mean to do it. No nation assembled and said, hey, let's go over to the dark side.

[15:24] Let's hand it all over to the power of evil and death. rather, individual after individual, nation after nation, chose not to live under the gracious rule of the living God and thus unwittingly relinquished dominion to the evil one.

It's in this sense that Jesus calls Satan the ruler of this world. It's in this sense that the apostle John can say the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. To the extent that nations and individuals give into disobedience and darkness, to that degree humanity lies in the grip of evil.

Yet there's always the larger truth. Although the living God honors the free choice of individuals and nations, God is still on the throne of the universe.

As the prophet Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar, the man after whom Saddam Hussein liked to fashion himself, the Most High is ruler over the realms of humanity and bestows authority on whom he wishes.

Therefore, on the first mountain, Satan was telling the truth. Yet, true to his character, he was not telling the whole truth. Satan did have a grip on the nations and could transfer the grip to Jesus.

[16:42] But Satan's grip was not absolute. In his drive to usurp authority, Satan deceived himself about his own importance. And he began to speak as though he were God.

I will give you the kingdoms of this earth. I. He's echoing the words of Psalm 2 where God says to the Son, Ask of me and I will give you the nations as your inheritance.

So inflated is Satan about his place in the structures of reality, he then says, Worship me. Fall down and worship me. The audacity. Let me paraphrase.

As long as you have the nations, Jesus, does it really matter how you got them? I'm not asking you to renounce your father. He does not even have to know. We can do this out in the desert in secret, in private.

After all, Jesus, what goes on in the private life of a king doesn't affect the way he rules his kingdom, does it? You can have the nations. Now, Jesus, you can have the nations and you can avoid the cross.

[17:51] And what would have been the consequences if the Son of God had given in? The world would be publicly ruled by Jesus but secretly by evil.

Jesus does not give in to this temptation and in that act saved the world. Jesus' response is instant indignation.

Be gone, Satan. It is written, you shall worship the Lord and your God and serve him only. Him only. Jesus is not about to compromise his allegiance to his Father for anything including getting the kingdoms of the world.

Jesus, in effect, is saying to Satan, I will serve my Father only even if it means the cross. And in that moment, the structures of reality changed.

Evil's place in the universe was altered evil finally met its match. Which is why then, Jesus leaves this first mountain, goes down into the valley and begins to announce what he calls the gospel of God.

[18:59] The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near. Jesus begins to heal the sick, free the oppressed and cast out demons. From that moment, Jesus was now in charge.

Oh, it often looked like he wasn't. It often looked like he was the victim of evil. But the fact is, he was anything but victim.

He had won the victory in principle and was now on his way to winning it in fact. On that first mountain, Jesus, as it were, tied Satan's hands.

Jesus could then begin to plunder the strong man's house. Plunder. Jesus uses this word plunder because that's the word God uses in that fourth song about the servant in the prophet Isaiah.

God says to the servant, to the suffering servant, I will allot him a portion with the great and he will divide the plunder with the strong. Plunder. Plunder. Jesus begins to plunder because that's the word that Isaiah uses in the fourth servant song.

[20:03] I will allot him a portion with the great and he will divide the plunder with the strong. From that moment that Jesus refused Satan's deal, Satan's grip was weakened. So Jesus moves into Satan's territory and begins to reduce to obedience the spirit powers.

You know that at one point Jesus sent out 70 disciples into the towns and villages with what he calls the good news. The kingdom of God has come near. Seventy of these people returned telling Jesus what had happened and Jesus responds, I was watching Satan fall like lightning.

Which happens any time. The gospel is preached and people respond. The reign of evil is collapsing. But as you know, the evil one did not give up.

He kept trying to get Jesus to take the shortcut to avoid the cross. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus' disciple Peter confesses his faith that Jesus is the son of God the Messiah.

Jesus then tells Peter that the son of God is going to go to Jerusalem and suffer the cross.

Immediately Peter rebukes Jesus. God forbid it, Lord, this shall never happen to you.

[21 : 14] God, forbid it. This is the very thing God calls Jesus to do in his baptism. And so Jesus says to Peter, get behind me, Satan.

For Jesus knows that the evil one is again tempting him to avoid the cross. Jesus would face that temptation many other times. In the garden of Gethsemane, the night before going to the cross, Jesus again wrestles with this baptismal call.

Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass for me. I take that to mean, is there any other way to win the nations? Since I've been on the earth, have you figured out any other way to be king without being a suffering servant?

Is there any way to avoid the cross? Jesus knew the answer, says to his disciples, come, let us And as we read the rest of the story, we are struck by the fact that Jesus does not seem to be overwhelmed by what begins to happen to him.

He does not act like a victim at all. Instead, as one scholar put it, Jesus strides forward like a conquering king approaching his throne. Jesus walks right into the face of evil and lets evil do everything it can to him.

[22 : 32] And at the cross, it looked as if Satan had finally won. It looked as though the way of servanthood had failed. Let me rephrase C.S.

Lewis' paraphrase of what Satan said to Jesus on the cross. You fool. You stupid fool. You simply would not face reality on this planet, would you?

You thought the meek would inherit the earth. Did you really think you could free people from my grip in this weak way? Now I will kill you. Who then will rescue the world?

Understand that you have given me the nations of the world forever. But that was not the case because evil did not know the power of the gospel.

Evil did not know the power of sacrificial love. So on the first day of the week when the women went to the tomb to anoint Jesus' body, the tomb was empty.

[23 : 35] He's not here, they were told. He is risen, just as he said. Go get the others and go to the mountain. To the mountain?

Yes, to the mountain. And they went and there they met Jesus alive. The grip of death had been broken, evil had not won.

And they worshipped Jesus. On the mountain, Jesus gives his victory speech. Listen, it changes the way reality goes together.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go disciple the nations. Did you hear him? All authority in heaven and on earth to me.

He had fulfilled the role of servant. He could now assume the role of king. Jesus now has legitimately what Satan offered deceitfully. All authority.

[24 : 38] The nations now belong to Jesus. I know that it sounds audacious to our post-modern ears, but it is the good news. The nations are now the possession of the king with nail scarred hands.

Oh, the forces of evil still seduce individuals and corporations and universities and governments with their deceptive lies and their offer of power. The forces of evil still tempt people to take shortcuts, to justify the means by the ends, to use coercion and violence, but that's because the forces have not yet heard the gospel.

They have not yet realized that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alters the way the world goes together. Two mountains, one before, one after, one before the crucifixion and resurrection, one after the crucifixion and resurrection, revealing that the way reality is configured has been changed.

Now, what does it all mean for us today? It means we no longer need fear evil. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

when you know the gospel, you can say that with greater conviction than David did. I will fear no evil.

[26 : 05] Yes, the battle still rages. The apostle Paul reminds us our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of darkness. And we need to be alert to that fact.

Church historian Richard Lovelace observes that much of the church's warfare today is fought by blindfolded soldiers who cannot see the forces range against them, who are buffeted by invisible opponents and respond by striking one another.

Yes, the battle continues, but the good news is we are dealing with crippled powers. Richard Lovelace again. In folk religion, the posture of the Christian toward evil is defensive. In scripture, the church is on the offensive, and the blows it receives from Satan, comfort, from a retreating enemy. Like sin and death, evil is still here.

Evil will not be totally annihilated until Jesus Christ comes in all his glory. But though it is still here, it is on a leash, our battle is with a defeated enemy. And so, South African pastor Desmond Tutu, whom I quoted a number of sermons ago, before he won the Nobel Peace Prize, could walk into the office of the person who enforced the policy of apartheid and say, Mr.

[27 : 23] Minister, we must remind you that at the end of history, your name will be a faint scribble on the pages of history, but the name of Jesus Christ will go on forever. Missionary Mary Webster reminds us, we do not work toward the victory, we work from the victory.

We are not in a battle to bring the nations under the rule of Jesus Christ, they already are. All authority in heaven on earth has been given to me. The missionary enterprise is not go make Jesus Lord of the nations, he already is.

Dutch politician Abraham Kuyper once said there is no place on earth or heaven over which Jesus of Nazareth cannot say that is mine. Altered structures of reality, I am telling you it has changed. In light of what happened between these two mountains, we now have a better understanding of what Jesus means by go disciple the nations.

He means go help the nations realize what has already happened and help them enter into the new reality. That is our job in the city.

[28 : 37] No one in my mind has understood this better than St. Patrick of Ireland. He believed the gospel and he was used by Jesus to bring upon the transformation of an entire nation.

Patrick was born in 385 A.D. At the age of 16 he was sold to slave traders and for 16 more years was forced to tend the sheep.

For those 16 years he was exposed to cold and hunger and danger and he spent months alone in the mountains. Then when he was 32 years old, he had a very real encounter with the lord of the nations who sent Patrick to Ireland with the gospel.

And within 30 years Ireland was almost completely converted. While the Roman Empire was moving from order to chaos, Ireland was moving from chaos to order.

Not because some new superpower came in and was forcing order but because of the liberating power of the gospel. In his book, How the Irish Saved Civilization, Thomas Cahill explains why Patrick had such an impact on Ireland.

[29 : 48] Before Patrick came, Ireland was held captive to what Cahill calls the most frightening worldview any nation has ever had. In the old Irish mythology, dark forces ruled the world.

Everywhere one turned, there were hidden traps and pitfalls. All kinds of taboos were developed to ward off these forces. But one never knew what taboo to use because in the Irish mythology, the powers kept shifting shape.

A god or a goddess might first be a river, then it would turn into a wave, then into a sea, then into an ox, then into a hawk, and so on. And into all of that stability and fear, Patrick came with the gospel. He was not afraid of the dark forces because he knew that the structures of reality had been changed. And even though the world be filled with these dark forces, he knew they were defeated forces.

Jesus Christ had defeated the darkness at the cross and thereby had robbed evil of its authority. Satan was not Lord of Ireland, Jesus was.

[30 : 57] Patrick's task was simply to declare the good news, which he could do because he lived it. Within thirty years, within one generation, Irish slave trading ended.

Murder and intertribal warfare ceased. Marriage became an honorable institution again. There was no longer any need to keep the peace by the sword because the Irish began to believe what Patrick preached to them, that evil was no longer in authority here.

Every day, St. Patrick went through the discipline of putting on what he called the breastplate. that is, he clothed himself with the affirmations of the gospel. Every day, he said these now famous words, I arise today through a mighty strength, the invocation of the trinity, through belief in the threeness, through confession in the oneness of the creator of creation.

I arise today through the strength of Christ's birth with his baptism, through the strength of Christ's crucifixion with his burial, through the strength of his resurrection and his ascension, through the

strength of his descent for the judgment of doom.

I arise today through God's strength to pilot me, God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to save me from snares of devils, from temptation of vices, from everyone who shall wish me ill, afar and near, alone and in the multitude.

[32 : 30] Christ to shield me today, Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I rise, Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me, Christ in the eye that sees me, Christ in the ear that hears me.

Patrick then entered the day closed with good news. so too you and I. We leave this place to go into our cities clothed with good news.

We do not go to bring Jesus Christ to the city, he's already there. We do not go to make Jesus Lord of the city, he already is. We go into the city to bring light, to help understand reality with a great big R, by words of truth and grace, by deeds of mercy and power, we demonstrate that the world has been changed.

Before the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, everything goes together one way, first mountain. After the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, everything goes together another way, in a way that sets captives free, second mountain.

There is no longer any reason to be afraid. faith. The stronger man has come, and he says, it is now all mine.

[34 : 04] exacerbation the blessed enough. The one last hundred in the life.

That means until he has come, that, he has come. He has come. Oh, God, born earth, Illinois will resume.

Just■ we