

The Serpent Crushing Seed

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[0:00] But let me begin with a question. What is it that brings you comfort and joy at Christmas? Is it getting lots of presents? Or have you passed that stage?

You're too old to get lots of presents? I'm not sure about that. But certainly that brings our kids lots of comfort and joy. Is it having a holiday after an exhausting year or two years? Or is it indulging in your favourite Christmas food at lunchtime and then having a nice siesta in the afternoon?

What is it that brings you comfort and joy at Christmas? Of course, as Christians, we especially are brought joy and comfort by Jesus, the birth of Christ.

That's what we remember, isn't it? But why does his advent, that is his coming or arrival, why does it bring comfort and joy? For one carol written in the 1700s, it was because Jesus would save us all from Satan's power.

Do you know this carol on the screen? I'm sure you do. Now, someone said to me, the first line sounds sexist to our modern ears. But just to clear that off the way, the carol means men and women, just like the word mankind in the 1700s meant men and women.

[1:14] And notice Jesus Christ, our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we had gone astray.

For this carol writer, that's what brings comfort and joy. Comfort and joy. That's what brings comfort and joy. But the question is, what is Satan's power?

And how does Jesus save us from it? And why does it bring comfort and joy? Well, it all begins in our first reading, which is, believe it or not, really the background to Christmas, Genesis chapter 3.

So we're at point 1, background to Christmas, and Genesis chapter 3, we heard that the serpent said to Eve, did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?

When God actually said they can eat from every tree except one. It reminds me of a cartoon I saw that says, why couldn't the forbidden fruit have been broccoli?

[2:17] I don't mind broccoli though, I think cauliflower makes more sense to me, but anyway. Of course it was the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, fruit that gave them knowledge so that they could decide for themselves what is good and evil, rather than trusting God's word to tell them what is good and evil.

People still do that today, don't they? Even some Christians don't trust parts of God's word and prefer to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, good and evil.

But the point here is the serpent twists God's word that said they can eat from every tree but one and deceives Eve into thinking they cannot eat from any tree at all.

And he does it again in verses 4 and 5 where he says, you will surely not die when sin means they will die. Spiritually then and there cut off from God to face judgment, they were kicked out of the Garden of Eden, you remember.

And they'll die physically later cut off from the tree of life. The serpent twists and deceives Adam and Eve. Have you heard the phrase, the devil made me do it?

[3 : 32] Well, if we skip down to verse 13, that's what Eve says, the serpent deceived me and I ate. Of course, it was still Adam and Eve's decision, so they're still responsible, they're still culpable, just like us.

But the serpent's deception meant sin entered our world and became part of our human nature. We are natural born sinners. We all naturally go astray, as the carol says.

As I've said to you before, you never have to teach children to be naughty. It comes naturally, doesn't it? And this gave Satan power.

The power to accuse us of not only being guilty, but having to pay for our own sins with judgment.

And so we need someone to save us from Satan's power to accuse, since we've all gone astray. And God promised such a person at the end of that reading.

[4 : 41] Towards the end, an offspring or a seed of a woman who would crush this serpent's head. And so throughout the Bible, we are looking for the arrival, the advent or coming of this serpent crushing seed.

And at Christmas, he arrived, didn't he? Now, as Vijay said last week, we all know the Christmas story as it happened on earth, but do you know the Christmas story as it happened in heaven?

Well, revelation shows us. As I said, I'm going to do something a little bit different this morning. And the word revelation means unveiling. It draws back the curtain and unveils what went on behind the scenes, that very first Christmas and beyond.

And it uses imagery and symbols to make the point. So we're at point two now, behind the scenes that first Christmas, and verse one and two on your sheets there. Have a look.

A great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown with 12 stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

[5 : 56] And so here's this woman about to give birth to an offspring, a seed. And she's called a sign or symbol because she represents someone.

We may think it's Mary since that's who gave birth to Jesus. But notice she has 12 stars on her head. Clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet.

Now do you remember one of Joseph's dreams where his parents, Jacob and Leah, were the sun and the moon and they bowed down to him and his 12 brothers, or 11 plus him, were the stars?

And from Jacob came 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Yeah. So the woman is faithful Israel at the time of Jesus who gave birth to Jesus in history, who of course includes Mary.

But the point is, this child would come from Israel because that's where God's promised king or Messiah would come from. But before he's born, there's a second sign in heaven, verse 3.

[7 : 07] Then another sign appeared in heaven, an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.

The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. Now who is this hungry dragon?

Well, verse 9 goes on to tell us, if you just skip there, it's that ancient serpent from Genesis 3. The one who's called the devil or Satan.

And notice back in verse 3, he has seven heads with seven crowns. In Revelation, the number seven is God's number.

And so the point of the symbolism is he's trying to rule as God. He's competing against God, acting as though he is God. While the horns are symbolic for power, you know, think a powerful rhino horn, you don't ever want to come up against that, do you?

[8:14] And the number 10 represents complete or great, so he has great power, so much so that he sweeps a third of the stars from heaven. In chapter 1 of Revelation, stars represent angels.

And so this symbolism presumably is talking about how Satan deceived a group of angels to follow him and become his minions.

But it seems the devil knows God's promised king was about to come into the world. And perhaps he knew this was the one whom God said would crush his head. And so he stands ready to devour this child instead.

It's not the normal picture of Christmas we see, is it? And so what happens? Well, verse 5, she gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.

And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God where she might be taken care of for 1260 days.

[9:20] Did you notice Christmas? Did you catch Christmas in verse 5? It was the birth of this male child, Jesus. The one who Psalm 2 says will rule the nations with an iron scepter.

Same language as Psalm 2. Although the word rule here is literally shepherd because that's the type of king Jesus is, a shepherd king. But when he was born, the devil did try to devour him.

Do you remember who wanted to kill Jesus? Herod, that's right. Remember how Herod told the wise men, oh look, report back to me so that I may worship this king too.

Meemaw. And of course, when the wise men didn't come back to Herod, what did he do? He killed every baby boy two years or younger in the whole vicinity of Jerusalem.

It was a massacre. That's what happened on earth. But behind the scenes in heaven was Satan tempting Herod to do this in order to devour this child, Jesus.

[10:30] You see, behind the scenes there was much more happening that very first Christmas. It's much more than a cute baby in a manger. It was actually the birth of the serpent crusher.

But verse 5 goes from Jesus' birth to his ascension. Did you notice? Jesus is born and then suddenly he's snatched up to God and he's thrown in heaven.

So where is the head crushing? Where is our salvation from Satan's power when we had all gone astray as the carol goes? Well, Revelation often shows different camera angles of the same event to give more information.

And that's what it does next. Verses 7 to 12 that middle section on your sheets basically unpacks what happens between Jesus' birth and his ascension before verse 13 picks up the woman going to a place prepared for her.

So let's see what happened. Verse 7 And war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and the dragon and his angels fought back but he was not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven.

[11:46] The great dragon was hurled down that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of God. and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters who accuses them before our God day and night has been hurled down.

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony that did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice you heavens and you who dwell in them.

Here the heavens are told to rejoice for the devil has been defeated. It seems he suffered a mortal or crushing blow to his head and so is hurled down from heaven.

It seems before this war in heaven Satan had access to God to accuse God's people day and night. It kind of reminds me of Job.

[13:01] Do you remember Job chapter 1 one day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord and Satan also came with them and he accused Job of fearing God for what he can get not for nothing.

But Satan loses his power to accuse here in Revelation and so he wages war in heaven but again loses against Michael and his angels and so he and his minions are now thrown down to earth no longer able to come before God to accuse God's people.

But here's the question why did he lose his power to accuse to start with? Well the answer is verse 11. God's people triumphed over his accusations over him how?

By the blood of the Lamb do you see? Jesus' death pays for our sins he takes our judgment in our place which means Satan can no longer accuse us of having to pay for our own sins.

Jesus has already paid. Do you remember back in the days of video and DVD stores? Do you remember renting videos? I'm sure you do.

[14:23] I remember going to the video easy store up at the Pines that was the one that we went to and I remember hiring a video from there one time but I sinned.

I brought it back late and whenever you brought them back late you would incur judgment for your sin a late fee wouldn't you? And so the next time I went to hire this a different video the teenager behind the counter looked up my file and she took unusual pleasure in informing me that I owed a late fee and that I could not rent this new video until I paid for my sin.

But just then the store owner actually said that's okay I'll cover the fee. It's never happened to me before or since but that happened that time. It seems he knew Netflix was coming to Australia and he wanted to keep my business for as long as possible I think but the teenager actually looked annoyed because she had lost her power to accuse me of having to pay for my own sin because the store owner had paid it.

And that's precisely what Jesus has done for us isn't it? His blood pays for our sins which was much more than a late fee. He took our judgment in our place so we don't have to miss out on and not a new video but the new creation.

And Satan has lost his power to accuse us of having to pay for our own sins for Jesus has already paid. It's kind of like what Hebrews says since the children have flesh and blood he that is Jesus too shared in their humanity that's Christmas so that by his death Easter he might break the power of him who holds the power of eternal death judgment the devil.

[16:17] Christ's blood pays for our sins takes our judgment so that Satan's power is broken which is why in verse 10 of our readings it says now has come the salvation the power and the kingdom of God for Christ's blood is God's power to give us salvation and entry into his kingdom now spiritually and later physically in the new creation and Jesus risen now rules as Messiah of course verse 11 also says that they triumphed over Satan by the word of their testimony and they did not love their own lives more than dying for Christ in other words they trusted in Jesus even to their death you see while it's Jesus's blood that defeats the devil crushes his head it's only those who have faith in Jesus that benefit from it only those who trust in Jesus who triumph over Satan and are assured a place in the new creation and so I guess the first application for us this morning is do you believe in

Jesus do you trust in him and his blood shed for you and will you trust in him even to death and for us who do and then the second application like the heavens we are to rejoice in Jesus this Christmas for he has set us free from Satan's accusations his power and assured us a place in the new creation which does bring comfort and joy does it not I was visiting someone on Friday actually and she said that she's been having lots of visits from people she said it's like everyone wants to visit me for the last time before I pass away because she's not sure of her health and yet someone asked her how do you feel about getting all these last visits and she said I'm at peace she has comfort and even joy why because she knows she's been freed from accusation and assured a place in the new creation in fact she said to me

Andrew this is what I want at my funeral this one verse therefore there is now no condemnation for those who in Christ Jesus see she believes in Jesus so knows she is free from Satan's accusations has no condemnation but rather an assured place in the new creation and it brought her genuine comfort and joy so rejoice in Jesus who brings comfort and joy and third hold fast to Jesus you see we live well after that first Christmas and that first Easter and while Jesus dealt a crushing blow to Satan's head at the cross a mortal wound Jesus hasn't completely crushed his head yet that will only happen with Jesus second advent or coming his return so Satan is down but not out he won't go without a fight he's already waged war in heaven but was hurled to earth and now like a wounded animal he's furious which is why in verse 12 the heavens are told to rejoice but you see the rest of verse 12 but woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you he is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short and so now in

Revelation we're back on earth after that first Christmas and Satan is waging war against God's people while he can that's a point three verse 13 when the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child the woman was given two wings of a great eagle so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness where she would be taken care of for a time times and half a time or that 1260 days out of the serpent's reach then from his mouth the snake spewed water like a river to overtake the woman and sweep her away with a torrent but the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth now these verses really pick up where we left off in verse six before we had that other camera angle because they both speak about the woman going to the place prepared for her so we're kind of picking up the action now back on earth only here we're given more information we're told that the satan pursued her but just as god rescued ancient israel from egypt and carried them to remember on eagles wings to himself at sinai so too he rescues faithful israel of jesus day protecting them from satan in life and bringing them to himself in death far out far away from satan's reach and so satan then turns to us verse 17 then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring that is those who keep god's commands and hold fast their testimony about jesus which is us isn't it since satan can no longer devour jesus or faithful israel who gave birth to him he now seeks to devour us the bible actually tells us from one peter to be alert and sober mind your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour but notice we are and can resist him standing firm in our faith the way the devil tries to devour us is by tempting non-christians to make life hard for us and we're seeing that more and more in our world aren't we and tempting us to disobey god with lies and deception he can no longer accuse us jesus has paid for our sin but he can still try to deceive us like adam and eve making us think we know what's right and wrong and so ignoring god's word which tells us what's right and wrong yet we can resist satan and stand firm in our faith we can continue to hold fast to jesus after all we've been given god's spirit to work in our conscience to encourage us and if you remember our ephesians series we've been given god's armor so that we can stand firm against the devil's schemes in fact we've also been given god's promise at the bottom of the screen that he will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear but will always give us a way out so we can endure it in fact did you notice in verse 17 that we too are now part of the woman's offspring seed for when we believe in jesus the serpent crushing seed we are united to jesus such that we will end up crushing satan's head paul says at the end of romans the god of peace will soon crush satan under your feet you see

together with christ as his family we will stand on that last day on judgment day and satan will be fully and finally dealt with but until that day hold fast to jesus especially over christmas you know we enjoy all those other things but don't let our enjoyment make us forget christ don't let our adversary tempt us away from jesus but hold fast and so to end this christmas trust in jesus whose blood freed us rejoice in jesus who gives comfort and joy and hold fast to jesus who saved us all from satan's power when we had gone astray let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for the birth of the lord jesus that very first christmas we thank you that although behind the scenes there was satan trying to devour him that you in your sovereignty protected the lord jesus saw him grow up and die for us that he might save us from satan's power when we had gone astray and so help us we pray to trust in jesus even to death help us to also rejoice in jesus this christmas and help us to hold fast to jesus in whose name we pray amen maybe a time to something or anything or the .