

## “Satan: A Second Look”

Luke 4: 1-13

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### “Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.”

There is a great deal of interest in angels right now. We even have stores dedicated to selling angel books, pins, ceramics, and other items. Angels are popular. Angels of light and love, that is. We do not want to consider that there might be other angels than the ones that sell so nicely in the bookstores. Yet, if we are to be honest with Holy Scripture, Twentieth Century history, and our own selves, then we need to take a second look at Satan, the angel who personifies evil. Certainly I am not talking about a little red man with pointed tail. That picture is a caricature designed to help trivialize the awesome impact of evil. There are other images of evil that carry much more profoundly the power of evil. I think of the character of the Phantom of the Opera who lives behind the mask. Consider the speeches of Hitler that moved hundreds of thousands of people to participate in evil actions. Remember the subtle deceptions of Screwtape and Wormwood of C.S. Lewis’ book, The Screwtape Letters. Do not forget the carnage of the Atlanta battle field in Gone with the Wind. What about the strong man wood cutter in Beauty and the Beast. I could go on and on naming figures of evil in our modern culture.

Jesus dealt with the authentic Evil One, Satan, angel of evil, in the desert after his baptism. The one who tested Jesus was not a silly Halloween figure. Let us look at this profound encounter seeking to learn from it so that we can live free of the angel of evil. The learnings listed here are not an exhaustive list. Ponder the Scripture for yourself and identify other learnings.

### Jesus’ teaches us about evil.

- **Evil is the reverse of Live.** Death associated with evil. Destruction, deception, chaos, and deceit are partners with evil. Evil will suggest that we look at the short-term pleasure and forget the long-term consequences. The Evil One will wear a mask of seeming beauty and pleasure, but it is only a mask. The face behind the mask is distorted with hate.
  - In a shop you’re given the wrong change; the assistant has moved on to the next customer and you’re looking at an extra \$20.00. You have always maintained “honesty is the best policy.” But,.....
  - You’re completely alone in a strange town. You meet a woman in the hotel lobby and lust laced with loneliness moves you toward the bedroom. You’ve always been against promiscuity, but.....
  - There’s this surplus of materials at work, just the kind of thing you need for that job at home. It would probably be thrown away anyhow, or spoiled in the weather. No one would care—everybody does it. Of course you are not a thief, but....
  - Someone has harmed you, or worse yet, someone you love. You find yourself hating them with a passion that you did not know you had in you. But, you are a Christian. You know praying for your enemy, the one you hate is the right thing to do, but.....

It’s in the little things that evil attacks with the goal of destroying life. Evil’s emphasis in the confrontation with Jesus is for the short term! “Eat the bread, now! Satisfy your hunger today! Make the decision right now!” Think what would be the long term, destructive consequences for the world and for you personally, if Jesus had chosen the short term path of rejection of God. The results would be death, eternal death for us all. Let us be clear! Anything that destroys life is not from God. Satan is the one who brings about death and destruction.

- **Evil is Not God.** There is nothing associated with evil that is connected with God.
  - God is life, life eternal. Evil is death.
  - God is truth. Evil is a lie.
  - God is love. Evil is hate, resentment, and rage.
  - God is justice. Evil is injustice.

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| • God is wisdom.        | Evil is ignorance.                |
| • God is righteousness. | Evil is the wrong way.            |
| • God is good.          | Evil is negative and destructive. |
| • God is beautiful.     | Evil is ugly.                     |
| • God is joy.           | Evil is sadness and tears.        |
| • God is eternal power. | Evil is powerlessness.            |

As we consider Jesus' encounter with Satan the angel of evil, let us not be tricked or deceived. Only God is God. Satan will wear a mask that makes him look like he is God, but there is no power in the hands of the Evil One. God alone is God. We either choose to be for God or we are against God. There is no middle ground. And, when we choose to follow the angel of evil, we give our personal power to Satan. That is why we sometimes do not want to hate, but find ourselves powerless to change!

- **Evil has no power by itself.** Notice how Jesus is asked to choose. Satan has no power to transform, to create, or to change anything except as Jesus gives him power. The Hollywood image of this powerful, evil presence in the world waiting to obliterate you is a falsehood. We humans tend to swing between the poles of not believing at all in an evil spiritual presence or creating this monstrous image that frightens us to death. The real truth lies here within the Scripture. Evil has no power except as we give it power. Humans as a group can give evil power and thereby create havoc on the face of our planet. When we join Satan behind the mask we bring destruction to our world. Together with Satan:

- We make war.
- We pollute the earth.
- We bring out the seeds of cancer and heart disease.
- We destroy the earth through our thoughtless development.

Individually we give evil power as we choose against God. Let us remember the truth of Jesus' encounter, evil has no inherent power.

- **Evil is not creative; therefore, evil is predictable.** Evil in this encounter does not surprise Jesus. The same three temptations are present in Satan's encounter with Adam and Eve at the beginning of human history. Satan does not change. The Evil One is predictable. We will be attacked in one of three ways. We will be tempted in one of three areas. Satan will approach us in regards to our self-interest; our personal power; or our personal pride. Let's quickly look at each tactic in Satan's strategy of destruction.
- **The Evil One attacks our Self-interest:** Satan suggests to the hungry Jesus that he use his power for his own needs. On the surface this is a logical, short-term solution to a major physical problem. After all, Jesus has fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. The long-term reality is this: "When we choose to place our self before God's mission we give evil power." Sometimes this self-centeredness is obvious:
  - It will not hurt for me to skip out of work early, just once.
  - It will not hurt to fudge the numbers, just this once.
  - It won't hurt to take this sleazy, rich client to a strip club just this once.
  - It won't hurt not to tell my spouse where I have been, just once.
  - It can't hurt this once to take out my frustration on the kids.
  - It couldn't hurt to work first and pray later, just today.
  - I can't hurt to leave out God's law and Christ's love out of my decision making, just this once.
  - Certainly everyone can agree that I have a right to hate that person after what they did to me.

Sometimes the self-interest is not so easy to define.

- When we play the role of victim, "poor me isn't the world treating me so bad" we are succumbing to Satan.
- When we narrow our focus to our own problems, our own concerns, our own troubles to the exclusion of anyone or anybody else, we are succumbing to Satan's temptation.
- When we are so wrapped in what others will think of us, we are succumbing to Satan.
- When we are protecting our assets to the exclusion of doing good for someone, anyone, even our families, then we are succumbing to Satan.

Allow me to share with you a true story from the psychiatric files of Dr. M. Scott Peck. He uses the word narcissism to describe evil laced self interest.

*"In his book **"The People of the Lie"**, therapist M. Scott Peck uncovers some of the covert ways in which narcissism does its damage. One case is based on Peck's interview with a thirty-year-old woman named Angela who was trying to borrow a thousand dollars from her mother to buy a car. At first, Angela got no response from her mother. Then through her brother she got the message that her mother had just discovered a lump in her breast that might be cancerous. With possible medical bills in her future, it was reasonable that her mother might not be inclined to send the money. But then a promissory note arrived in the mail: her mother wrote that she would be willing to loan Angela the money if she would sign the note. The letter made Angela feel guilty. She worried that accepting the loan might compromise her mother's security by potentially leaving her unable to take care of bills for medical treatments that would be necessary to save her life. She didn't know what to do, and the dilemma was agonizing. 'She always offers me something with the right hand and pulls it away with the left,' Angela told Peck.*

*"Later Peck discovered that Angela's mother owned three apartment buildings and was probably a millionaire. He concluded that Angela's mother was a narcissist who used guilt to manipulate her daughter.*

*"This led Peck to speculate on the nature of evil. He argues that it is a lack of empathy that characterizes narcissists and renders them evil. Narcissists are insensitive to the feelings of others. If I love another person, this love gives me the ability to see things from that person's viewpoint, perhaps even to feelings that are precious to them. If we love only ourselves, we cut ourselves off from anyone else's feelings. Those in whom narcissism becomes total lack, 'in whole or in part, this capacity for empathy.'"(Ted Peters, Sin: Radical Evil In Soul and Society, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989, p. 96)*

Turning a stone into bread is when we use our special gifts or special status, our personal interest to obtain benefits for ourselves without considering the impact these actions will have on others, or on God's desire for the world.

We are given the greatest status possible for any human being. In and through Jesus we are given the right to become children of the living God. **(John 1:12)** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+1:12](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+1:12)) Let us celebrate our heritage in the family of God while rejecting the short term, narcissistic choices meeting our needs now.

- **The Evil One attacks by inviting us to Worship Personal Power:** When we give the final authority, the ultimate control of our lives to someone or something other than God in Christ Jesus, then we are playing into the trick of Satan and giving power to this Evil One. When we worship:
  - Building up our social status,
  - Satisfying our craving for new and ever more thrilling experiences, believing more and bigger is always better;
  - Needing to feel in control, in charge, and on top of the heap at all times;
  - Wanting to build bigger and bigger bank accounts to protect us from any eventuality.

Only God is the source of power in this universe. Only God can give you the power to live, create, build up, and celebrate life. Only God can give you the security you need. Christ and Christ alone is the source of true creative power. **(Matthew 28:18)** ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+28:18](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=matthew+28:18)). When we follow false gods, giving them our personal power that is given to us by God, then we place our lives and the lives of our family and friends into the service of destructive, demanding devils from hell. When you wear the mask of being the captain of your own soul, you are actually following Satan!

- **The Evil One tricks you to Focus on Personal Pride:**

We get trapped by sentimental theories that suggest that God will take care of us, no matter what we choose to do with our life. We get trapped into thinking that we do not need to pray. God already knows anyway. We get seduced into thinking that we do not need to worship; it's just a waste of precious time. We are tricked into thinking that we do not need to participate with other Christians; most of them are below our intellectual level anyway. What can I learn from them?

Jesus can make a big entrance into Jerusalem. Because Jesus is who he is I am sure Jesus will have longer than Andy Warhall's fifteen minutes of fame. Jesus probably would be set for life after such a glorious entrance with angels holding him up! Adam and Eve fell for this temptation at the beginning of time. Human beings have been giving Satan their personal power ever since then. We learn slowly what Jesus quickly articulated. Our true selves, our real existence, who we are and hope to be, are directly connected to God's love. We are God's people. The Apostle Paul's words ring true in our experience with Jesus Christ: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation! The old is gone and the new is come!" (**II Corinthians 5:17**) ([www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+5:17](http://www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=ii+corinthians+5:17)) God created us to grow a beautiful garden on planet earth. God created us to live free of masks, free to share God's grace and build up God's Kingdom of Heaven on earth! When our own pride keeps us from participating on God's team, then we join forces with destruction and death.

### **With Jesus as our Savior, we can overcome Satan and live free of masks.**

An encounter with Satan will cause us to give away the power to live free that God has given us. When Satan takes over we are left feeling vulnerable. Therefore, we put on a mask. We project an image to the world. We create roles for ourselves to act out so that we can feel in control. Our masks hide our fears and keep us thinking that we are all right. Our masks keep us hating those who threaten us. Our masks hide us from the world and even from ourselves. We expend a great deal of personal energy keeping up the mask, living in the midst of a charade. The great tragedy is that we begin to believe that we are so flawed that no one will love us with the mask or without the mask. Following Satan, the angel of evil leads us into a no win, dead end.

That great musical drama, "Phantom of the Opera" is a great example of the loss of life and love when we live behind the mask. In the closing scene of the opera, the Phantom sings to Christine, "That fate which condemns me to wallow in blood has also denied me the joys of the flesh...this face...the infection which poisons our love...This face which earned a mother's fear and loathing...A mask, my first unfeeling scrap of clothing...Pity comes too late---turn around and face your fate; an eternity of this before your eyes!" Christine sings to the now unmasked Phantom, "This haunted face holds no horror for me now....It's in your soul that your true distortion lies..."

Jesus' encounter with Satan offers us great hope!

- In and through Christ Jesus you can live free of the masks that distort our souls.
- In and through Christ Jesus you can live with a tap root deep into God's transforming power.
- In and through Christ Jesus you can find the wisdom to simply quote Holy Scripture and be victorious over Satan's deceptions.
- In and through Christ Jesus and within Christ's body, the Church, you can take off your mask and be accepted and loved just the way you are.

Billy Graham's favorite hymn captures the freedom we have when we live within the circle of God's grace rejecting Satan's mask!

Just as I am, without one plea,  
But that Thy blood was shed for me,  
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,  
O Lamb of God, I come.

**"Life is too short to waste time hating anyone."**