

WAR ON THE SAINTS

Eight days of
devotional readings
for Suffering Church
Action Week 2016

1

Sunday 30 October 2016

SPIRITUAL WARFARE – A REALITY

Revelation 12:7-8

In the Old Testament we read how Satan, filled with pride, wanted to be like God and to usurp His throne. He who was described as the Day Star (literally the Shining One, Lucifer) wanted to take over the high priestly roles of Jesus Christ. In his defiance of God, he tried to assert his will above the will of God. We read in Isaiah 14:13 his repeated plans: “I will ... I will...” In his rebellion, he fell (Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-17; 1 Timothy 3:6).

The name of the archangel Michael means “Who is like God?” In his very name, Michael poses a question which answers itself in that there is no one like God. God alone is unique, without an equal and no comparison can be made with Him. That is what Michael’s name means. Michael, therefore, stands for all that is in opposition to Satan and his works.

In the Bible, Michael is presented as the protector of God’s people (Daniel 12:1). He watches over the people of God. Revelation 12:7-9 depicts the conflict between Christ, represented by his archangel Michael, and Satan. The battle rages on earth and in heaven, with Christians the target, as they suffer temptation, persecution and death. We need to remember that this is not an eternal conflict and it is not dualism. Rather it is a conflict between Christ who is uncreated, almighty, omniscient, omnipresent and eternal, and Satan who is created and therefore limited in his power and knowledge, unable to be everywhere at the same time. There is a victor – Christ.

*I praise you, Lord Jesus Christ, for the victory that
You won on the cross over sin, death and Satan.*



Suffering Church
Action Week

2

Monday 31 October 2016

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

Revelation 12:9

The word “Satan” itself originally meant any “adversary” or “enemy”. Gradually the meaning narrowed to the way we use it now. While the Christian seeks to make no one an enemy, we are faced with an enemy not of our making. He is an enemy from whom we cannot retreat, with whom we can neither make peace nor compromise.

The Bible gives at least 41 names for Satan. He is the father of lies, the destroying angel, the accuser of the brethren, Beelzebub. He is described as a roaring lion, intimidating and frightening us. He is the epitome of all that is evil, cruel and opposed to God. This is the enemy that now confronts the Church.

He is the “dragon”, the creator of chaos. As we think of the death and destruction caused today in the Middle East by groups like Islamic State, we can see very well why he carries this name. The dragon is the arch-enemy of Christ and the Church. He tried to devour the Christ-Child and now he persecutes the mother Church.

He is the “ancient serpent”, who tempted Adam and Eve, causing them to sin. He tried to do the same to Job, but failed; Job remained faithful to God (Job 1:1-2:9).

The word “devil” is only found in the New Testament. The literal meaning is “slanderer” and much of his destructive work is in the form of accusatory lying words. Truly he is the deceiver of the whole world.

*“The ancient prince of hell hath risen with
purpose fell; strong mail of craft and power he
weareth in this hour.” (Martin Luther)*

Tuesday 1 November 2016

HOW SATAN ATTACKS

Revelation 12:9-10

One of Satan's methods is deception. He tries to lead the world astray. In Genesis 3:1-5 he led our first parents astray by lying, and he continues, often disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). He seems to offer truth and insight but in reality what he offers is false and deceptive.

As deceiver, he uses every wile and device (Ephesians 6:11; 2 Corinthians 2:11) to trick and trap us, to lure the people of God away from the right path. He snatches away the Word before it can take root in our hearts (Luke 8:5,12).

In verse 10 he is called the accuser. This a translation of *delator*, a prosecution lawyer. The devil's original role was as prosecuting counsel in the heavenly court (Zechariah 3:1; Job 1-2). But often, as here, he acts maliciously, making false accusations. It is only a small step from bringing charges to inventing charges, from accuser to slanderer. Slander and false accusation are amongst his favourite methods of operating. Satan is "the cynical libeller of all that God has made" (H.B. Swete).

When Revelation was written, ancient Rome was a society of people constantly informing on each other, denouncing each other to the authorities, leading to arrest, torture and death. The Roman historian Tacitus commented that "he who had no foe was betrayed by his friend". Satan put the idea of betrayal in Judas's mind (John 13:2,27). Many Christians today are falsely accused, such as Aasia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian mother sentenced to death on a false charge of blasphemy.

"No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him is mine! Alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ my own."
(Charles Wesley). Thank you, Lord.

Wednesday 2 November 2016

THE PROCLAMATION OF VICTORY

Revelation 12:10

The seeming defeat of Jesus on the cross gave way to the triumph of the resurrection. The disciples too experienced defeat. They had betrayed their Lord. They had forsaken Him in His hour of need and, filled with fear, they faced the future. Then Jesus revealed Himself to them and this encounter brought new hope and new courage. From a beleaguered minority they became a mighty force, an army, which transformed the then known world. Salvation came.

They offered to that world salvation and redemption, whether it be to the Jew with an inner longing for the Messiah and the promised Day, or the Graeco-Roman religions with their multiplicity of gods, or the mystery esoteric religions with their desire for an inner experience. Salvation in Jesus Christ alone became their message.

Through the power of God and the authority of Christ, the Church was established. Jesus Himself had said, "I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18). Jesus the Messiah, the anointed one, the Son of God, brings into being a people filled with the divine presence, who now, through Christ, can exercise that divine authority and, like their Master, bring healing and hope to a broken world.

Yet this message, far from being received as it was in the earliest days, soon met with obstruction, hostility and even hatred as the disciples were abused, stoned, imprisoned and killed. So today it continues, for example in Russia where since July it has been illegal to witness without prior permission from the state.

Lord, give me the grace and courage to persevere in serving You and sharing the Gospel, no matter what opposition I may encounter.

Thursday 3 November 2016

CONQUERING THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

Revelation 12:11a

“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” said John the Baptist, when he saw Jesus approaching. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain (Revelation 5:6), who was sacrificed for our sins, who shed His blood for us on the cross. The lamb is an emblem of innocence and purity. It was also the animal commonly offered in sacrifice. For both these reasons, Jesus our Messiah is called the Lamb.

The blood of Christ speaks of the Atonement, with its primary emphasis on death which leads to life. In the New Testament blood indicates a violent death, so the blood of the Lamb speaks of the violent death of Christ, once for all, upon the cross. It is the blood of the New Covenant that Jeremiah foretold (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Jesus is both the sacrificial lamb and the high priest. His blood seals the covenant relationship between God and His people and has power to effect salvation, to sanctify, redeem, forgive and protect. For God’s suffering people, abused and persecuted, the blood of Jesus has not lost its efficacy or power. It continues not only to sanctify but also to shelter them and, together with the angelic host, to bring them safely Home.

“Blood of Christ, victor over demons, save us.”

In Revelation 7:14 we read of those in heaven, dressed in white robes, who have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb that was slain rose to life again, our sins are forgiven, and the accuser has lost his power over us.

Jesus, Lamb of God, protect me by the power of Your shed blood and bring me to Your glory at the end.

Friday 4 November 2016

CONQUERING THROUGH THE WORD OF THEIR TESTIMONY

Revelation 12:11b

In a law court, the one who gives testimony to what he or she has personally witnessed is crucial. It can determine life or death. The Christian’s testimony is what they have experienced, the reality of Jesus and the truth of His Word. The martyr’s witness to Christ and to His saving work is a direct attack on Satan himself. Their faithfulness not to deny Him by their word, despite all opposition, is crucial. Time and again, we read of faithful Christians who in their simplicity refuse to deny Jesus but continue to bear witness to Him. Well may they echo, “I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me.”

“Kill me, but I will not abuse the Name of Jesus,” said Deepak, an Indian evangelist, to the Hindu extremists who had chained and beaten him for five hours until he lost consciousness, stripped him naked, given him electric shocks and threatened to throw him on a railway track unless he insulted Jesus. The attack occurred on 5 April as Deepak was travelling to a village in Bihar state to share the Gospel. He knew well the power of his word of testimony.

*Though the winds roar
And the storms rage
I will not deny You,
O my Lord.
Though the blows abound
And the anguish mounts
I will not deny You,
O my Lord.*

*For You hold me
In the palms of Your hands.
You will not deny me.
For my name is written
On Your forehead.
You will not deny me.*

Lord, keep me a faithful witness that, when You take me Home, I may affirm, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

7

Saturday 5 November 2016

CONQUERING THROUGH MARTYRDOM

Revelation 12:11c

“The blood of the martyrs is to the Church as water to a garden.” – John Chrysostom

Martyrdom is victory. It signals the defeat of Satan. The saints themselves, however, far from being defeated, rise in victory, through their shed blood, like their Saviour who endured the cross and was faithful even unto death. The blood of the martyrs causes new life to spring forth, as a garden radiant with the beauty of flowers.

Willing to embrace the cross and sacrifice their lives, the martyrs demonstrate their loyalty to Christ and willingness to pay that ultimate price of death for the sake of their Lord. Such commitment knows no bounds. Such love knows no end.

Christian martyrs are not like suicide “martyrs” who deliberately die for their cause. Rather, for Christian martyrs it is simply that they do not cling to earthly life. They are willing, if necessary, to let go, to lay down their lives for Christ, as did the 21 Egyptian martyrs in Libya, beheaded by Islamic State in February 2015. It is a natural progression from a life of witnessing to the ultimate witness of a martyr’s death. The martyrs have a glorious place in heaven and receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

While we are not all called or permitted to die for Christ, He has called us all to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily (Matthew 16:24-25). This is a living martyrdom (1 Corinthians 15:31). For some who have been entrusted with a very heavy cross, it is perhaps more difficult to carry it day after day year after year than to die once.

Jesus, my Lord and Saviour, help me to continue faithful and true, loving and forgiving, committed only to You, whether in life or in death.

8

Sunday 6 November 2016

REJOICING

Revelation 12:12

In the great battle that is being fought in the heavens, and is also experienced here on earth with its pain and even death, there is to be found joy and victory and ultimately glory. There is joy in heaven as the angels sing. There is joy on earth as the saints rejoice. For salvation has indeed come, the Gospel is being proclaimed across the face of the earth, countless souls are being won for Christ, His Kingdom is being established with the Lord Jesus at its head. Satan’s darkness and Satan’s forces are defeated.

In the midst of the greatest suffering can be found the greatest Kingdom growth. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, where believers bear the brunt of oppression and violence, Muslims from all walks of life are turning to Christ so fast that the Church can barely cope. The martyr church of China now resounds with the praises of Christ as a hundred million or more love, trust and follow Him.

For the faithful, those who have borne the heat of the day and the cold of the night, those who have experienced and endured the battle, for them awaits the victor’s crown and the words: “Well done, good and faithful servant.” They will sing with the angels, the elders, the martyrs and the multitude from every nation that stand before the Lamb upon the throne (Revelation 7:9-17).

*Cover the Way with flowers
Clap your hands
For Jesus reigns!
Dance together,
Sing halleluiah,
Marching in Christ’s triumphant train.*

Blessing and honour and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 7:12)