

The Powers of Hell, the Schemes of Man, and the Sovereign Grace of God (Part 1)

Introduction

The Text

¹ Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. ² And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people.

³ Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. ⁴ He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. ⁵ And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. ⁶ So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd.

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." ⁹ They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" ¹⁰ He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters ¹¹ and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." ¹³ And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. (Luke 22:1–13)

Satan and Christmas?

- A. I want to preach a sermon this morning about Satan and how he meddles in the hearts of men co-opting them for his own dark and cruel purposes in the world.
1. And you say: "A sermon about Satan?! On December 13th? I was hoping for something a little more cheery, with a little bit more Christmas in it, you know. We're in the weeks Advent after all." And I understand the sentiment, I really do.
- B. But, truthfully, it could be argued that there really is no topic more fit for Christmastime than this.
1. After all, when John is pressed to answer: why Bethlehem, why the incarnation, why Christmas and the coming of Christ? He unhesitatingly replies: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).
 2. And the author of Hebrews is in full agreement on this point as well: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil . . ." (Heb. 2:14).
 3. Even our more modern carols are up to speed: "God rest you merry, gentlemen, / Let nothing you dismay, / For Jesus Christ our Savior / Was born upon this day, / To save us all

from Satan's power / When we were gone astray: / O tidings of comfort and joy, / comfort and joy, / O tidings of comfort and joy." To save us all from Satan's power! That's why there's a baby in a manger.

- C. So I'm not as out of touch with the season as it may first appear. This is the point! Not the cookies, not the lights, not the gifts, not the warm-fuzzies and nostalgia—I like all that stuff, don't get me wrong—but THIS, this is what it's about!
- D. So I'll be preaching two sermons on these verses before us. And through the course of these two sermons we'll make our way through three headings—the first two will be our focus in this sermon, the latter will be our sole focus in the sermon coming next week.
 - 1. But here are the three headings: (1) The Powers of Hell; (2) The Schemes of Man; and (3) The Sovereign Grace of God. So let's get to work!

(1) The Powers of Hell

"Then Satan Entered into Judas . . ."

- A. The first order of business here is to immediately draw out for us the simple fact that what is about to go down in the hours that follow—with the betrayal and the trial and the crucifixion—all of these things while on the surface they seem to be conflicts between Jesus and mere human beings (Jew, Gentile, Judas, Pilate, etc.), the deeper reality is that we are witnessing a much more cosmic and spiritual conflict taking place between Jesus and the devil.
 - 1. So we read in [v. 3](#): "[Then Satan entered into Judas . . .](#)" It's this verse here that I'm really going to be riffing on for this entire message.
 - a. But, again, the essential fact is made plain: before the betrayal of Judas is this "[entrance](#)" of Satan. He's behind it. He's on the move here. That's the fundamental issue.
- B. You know, my dad and I a while back went on a hiking trip in and around King's Canyon, and at the time we were there, I think it may have been early summer, the rattlesnakes were everywhere. So much so that, not only did we see quite a few of them as we hiked (I almost jumped on a baby when I was bouldering a bit), but we also saw their "tracks" woven into the dust of the various trails we were on.
 - 1. And I'm saying that's the sort of thing going on in these final chapters of Luke. There are snake tracks all over the place.
 - a. We're likely going to get all caught up in what Judas and the chief priests and Peter and Pontius Pilate and all these people are doing, but we can't miss the fact that in and behind it all lurks a darker, more sinister spiritual power.

An Ancient Tension

- A. This conflict between God and the devil is one that spans back to the very beginning of the story and, indeed, seems to have begun even back before that. And so I thought under this first heading, we best take a moment to at least recall this ancient tension in an effort to catch the full significance of all that's taking place here.
1. [Gen 1](#). The Spirit of the Lord is hovering over the face of the deep. There's darkness and chaos, but into this God speaks forth light and order. He forms and He fills and He sets man, made in His image, over it all, to rule and reign under and with Him in all the earth. It was all very good . . . until it wasn't.
 2. In [Gen 3](#), suddenly we're made aware of another being, a rebel creature of some sort, a power of evil with an axe to grind. In the narrative we're just told it's a "serpent" and it's only as the Bible unfolds and later authors reflect on this that we come to discern this as the work of one called the Satan, a Hebrew word which means the Adversary or the Accuser.
 - a. And this being, Satan, seems bent on dragging God's good creation back into darkness and disorder. So he begins at the top of the food chain, with those made in God's image, those closest to God's heart, and he gets them to question, to doubt, to turn, to rebel—to define good and evil for themselves and take up the prerogatives of God alone.
 3. So God comes to curse, yes the man, yes the woman, but first the serpent. And tucked within His curse of the serpent is a promise for all mankind. Do you remember this, [Gen 3:15](#): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."
 - a. This is what Biblical scholars refer to as the protevangelion—the first-gospel, the beginnings of the good news. For here we have promised one who will come in some promised line from the woman, and though He shall be bruised on the heel, He shall have the devil's head!
 - i. Wounded in the process but triumphant in the end! Does that sound familiar?
 4. So the years roll on. Conflict continues between God and the Satan. God's men, even the best of them, are tempted and fall, just like their forefather Adam—from Abraham, to Moses, to David, to Solomon.
 - a. But then at the turn of the ages, this promised seed of the woman comes—Christmas, Bethlehem, a baby in a manger, the hope of all mankind!
 5. He's relatively quiet, until He's around thirty years of age ([Luke 3:23](#)), the age at which a Levite would typically take up his ministry and service in and around the temple. He makes His first real public appearance there in the Jordan River where He's baptized by John. And then what?

- a. The Spirit falls upon Him and immediately thrusts Him out into the wilderness . . . to be tempted by the devil. Three times Jesus is tempted in the same sorts of ways Adam and Eve were and yet three times He holds His ground.
 - i. The devil staggers back from the blow, but resolves not to give up the fight. In fact, Luke ends his narration of the wilderness temptations by noting that “when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13).
- 6. And then, in [Luke 22:3](#), it appears that this “opportune time” has arrived: “Then Satan entered into Judas . . .”
 - a. Hence, Jesus’ own words down in [v. 53](#): “[T]his is your hour, and the power of darkness.”
 - i. This is it. It’s time for [Gen 3:15](#) mortal combat; it’s time for heel-bruising and head-crushing; it’s time for sin-bearing and curse-removing.
- B. That’s what’s going on here. The powers of hell are being unleashed upon the Son of God in these moments!

(2) The Schemes of Man

- A. Now, seeing that all of this stands in the background, we are better prepared to ask, okay, so how does Satan get men to participate in his plot of rebellion? Because that’s what features largest here on the surface narrative, am I right?
 - 1. We don’t see Jesus and Satan going head to head, though they are. What we see is Jesus being confronted by wicked men, by those who have hitched their wagon to Satan’s cause as it were. The devil baits men and women—you and I—into doing his dirty work.
 - a. And this is the sort of thing we must turn our attention to now. How does such a thing happen?
- B. When we see here this idea of Satan entering Judas, there are three things I should like to consider now in particular with you: (1) That He Enters; (2) How He Enters; and (3) Why He Enters.
 - 1. And after we sufficiently deal with these we’ll close with a quick discussion of how Christmas really changes everything for us.

(1) That He Enters

- A. The first thing I want to bring out quickly here is simply that Satan enters Judas. What I mean is, we must step back and reckon with the fact personally that the influence of Satan is a reality in the world—that he is a force to be reckoned with and Jesus would have us take him seriously.
- B. You know, as far as secular modern folks are concerned, there has been a move away from belief in spiritual things. We are enlightened people. We believe in science, not superstitious spiritual

beings like Satan and demons and stuff like this. We might as well still believe in monsters and the bogey man. Such things are the notions of weak-minded people who still sleep with a nightlight, so it is said.

1. But you see, where modern man may scoff at the supernaturalism and spirituality of the Bible, they do typically, on the whole, appreciate the general moral teaching of Jesus. They look at the code of ethics put forward in the Sermon on the Mount, for example, and say: “Yes, this is good!”
 - a. You will rarely come across a person who thinks Jesus was just a scoundrel. Most think Him an erudite teacher and moral guide.
- C. But you cannot divide Him up like this. You either must take what He says about both morality and spiritual realities or you must count Him a raving lunatic with regard to all subjects.
 1. Because, while Jesus would talk about ethics and morality with great acuity and insight, He would just as quickly turn and speak of Satan getting behind Him and seeing Satan fall like lightning and things like this. He took the devil seriously. As I showed up front, that’s the north star of His ministry: to do away with him.
 - a. So we must confront the fact that either Jesus is crazy and we should throw away everything He has to say to us, or He’s insightful and wise and we should take not just His words on ethics but His words on spiritual evil as well. But you can’t have it both ways.
- D. As far as the church is concerned, it seems we are prone to one of two extremes.
 1. Some go the way of secular culture and make too little of Satan. We may read of Him in our Bible studies but we blush a bit as we do, and feel a bit foolish. Functionally we don’t take the powers of evil too seriously at all.
 2. But then there are others of us, who perhaps in overreaction to the modern ethos, make too much of a deal of the demonic and things. There’s a demon under every bush and around every corner. Everything is spiritualized and exaggerated. We think too much of these beings and give them too much credit.
- E. The goal I think is to thread the needle as Paul does in [Eph 6](#).
 1. Against the secularists among us he speaks outrightly: “[W]e do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (v. 12)
 - a. This is huge when so many of us these days are wanting to blame someone for the stuff we’re dealing with—the government, the boss, the spouse, the pastor, etc. We forget there’s an unseen enemy that lurks in the shadows.
 - i. Jesus doesn’t treat Judas as the enemy. When he comes under cloak of darkness to betray Him with a kiss, what does Jesus call him? “Friend . . .”

(Matt 26:50). “I know you’re not the enemy. I know My true enemy has you in his grip.” He sees the spiritual behind the physical, the powers of hell behind the schemes of man.

(1) And we need to remember that as well and stop attacking fellow image-bearers as if they are the enemy. So Paul reminds us to take these spiritual forces seriously.

2. But, on the other hand, against those who would exaggerate and overdo such a focus, he goes in Eph 6 to remind us that we have armor in the Lord and we can and will overcome the evil through Him.

F. So we see Satan is still on the move today, and, though we need not fear, we best take it to heart.

(2) How He Enters

(1) With Permission

A. I want to make it plain that I don’t think the devil can just come in. Certainly he can oppress. Certainly he can afflict. Certainly he can tempt. But I don’t think he can just enter into a person as we see here with Judas without some sense of permission.

1. Satan can knock on the door of our hearts. He can hold candy up to the peephole and tempt with his various offerings, but he can’t just break down the door. You open it.

B. Now, why do I say this? Well, because in every instance of sin I see in the Bible, even when the devil seems to be so directly involved, God still holds man accountable.

1. So in Gen 3, yes God puts a curse on Satan, but He also calls Adam and Eve out onto the mat. They didn’t have to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They didn’t have to rebel. The devil knocked and they opened.

2. Or, later, Ananias and Saphira, you remember Peter says: “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit . . .” (Acts 5:3). So Satan is clearly behind this, but does that get them off? No. God just drops them dead right then and there as an act of judgment for their sin. They’re responsible for their own actions, whether incited by Satan or not.

3. And so it is even here with Judas as well. Jesus will go on to say Luke 22:22: “[T]he Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” Not just “woe to Satan,” but “woe to that man . . .” Judas is no helpless victim here. He is, in many ways, a willing accomplice.

C. So listen, if the devil is going to get the upper hand in your life, it’s going to be because you let him.

1. This is why Paul says take up the armor and fight the good fight of faith, take captive every thought, don’t just let him in through the door.

- a. Oh he's knocking, he's got some little trinket held up to the peephole, I don't know in what way, but he's knocking, he's there, I can guarantee you that . . . but, listen to me: you don't have to let him in!

(2) In Disguise

- A. If we've got to let him in, if we're the ones who give sway to him over our hearts and lives, he's got to at least make himself look good on the outside, right?
 - 1. If he shows up full fangs and fury, we're not going to fall for that. We're going to run, we're going to fight. So he comes in wearing his Sunday best.
- B. You know my kids are at the age where they love watching cartoons and things. And one of the things that you always see in cartoons is they make the villain super obvious.
 - 1. Like, everyone else has these radiant colors and big smiles and then in walks the bad guy and his face is like puke green, he's teeth are all yellow, and he's got these sharp, pointy features. He may as well have big old devil horns coming out from his forehead. You just know the dude's evil before he even opens his mouth.
- C. But now listen: that's how cartoons work, but that's not how Satan works. So Paul tells us that ["Satan disguises himself as an angel of light"](#) (2 Cor. 11:14).
 - 1. You're not going to fall for it if you see where he's trying to take you, if you see what he's really trying to do, if you see who he really is and what he's really all about, so he makes it all look so good. He enters in disguise.
- D. So this is why even in our text, did you notice, who are the bad guys?
 - 1. Well, the bad guys are the good guys, at least the guys that you would think should be good.
 - a. In v. 2 it's ["the chief priests and the scribes"](#) that are ["seeking how to put him to death . . ."](#) These are some of the religious leaders in Israel, guys that study the Bible for a living, the cleanest folks around . . . and their hearts are filthy, wicked, devilish.
 - b. And in v. 3, who is Judas? Well we're told he was ["of the number of the twelve"](#) — one of Jesus' closest disciples, hand-picked by Christ Himself, the inner circle, walked with Jesus for three years.
 - i. No one would have thought this guy's going to suit up with Satan. Even the disciples, when Jesus is saying one of you is going to betray me, they had no clue it was Judas (cf. [Luke 22:23](#)). And even after Jesus says it's the guy who I'll give this morsel of bread to, and He gives it to Judas and says: ["What you are going to do, do quickly"](#) ([John 13:27](#)). And they're all sitting there still not getting it, thinking, did Jesus go tell him to get us groceries for the feast or something? They never suspected this.

- E. And, you know, part of me wonders how much these Jewish leaders or even Judas were aware of just how deep things had gotten.
1. Certainly the chief priests and the scribes had no clue. They thought they were doing God's work. They were convinced they were holy and righteous. In [John 8](#), Jesus calls the Jews sons of the devil and they flip, they're so offended. They're sons of Abraham. How could he say this? They're clueless. They don't get it. They've justified it all in their minds. They're feeling good about themselves, even as they're eating from the devil's palm.
 2. And Judas, I've often wondered how all this went down in his life—if he planned from the beginning to later turn on Jesus or if it happened slowly over time, little compromises, little self-justifications, little sins . . . until suddenly they're not so little anymore, and you're welcoming Satan's suggestions of transgression and betrayal. I think that's probably it.
- F. And all of this is a warning for us. The devil comes dressed in his Sunday best. He points to fruit that looks good. Don't trust appearances. Run everything by God's Word. Beware of self-justifying little compromises that send you down the road of betrayal.
1. The door doesn't always open all at once, often it's inch by inch, day by day.

(3) Through Idolatry

- A. The last thing I'd say on this is that Satan enters through idolatry.
1. Here's what I've been alluding to when I've said that the devil is going to hold up some candy or some trinket or gold-plated thing up to the peephole in the door of your heart as he's knocking. "Hey look at this, doesn't it look good, isn't this going to satisfy, oh I know God said not now or not in this way, but c'mon, come and get it. Just open up."
 - a. This is the stuff Satan baits his hook with. He doesn't dangle a hook in the water. He baits it with the things of this world.
- B. An idol is really something, anything, you're trusting to do for you what only God truly can. It's when you give your heart away to some lesser thing. It's when you start seeking your satisfaction, your justification, your life, not in and through God and Jesus, but by going around and even against them.
1. It's the stuff of this world, even the good stuff, that becomes too important to us, so important to us that we're willing to trade God for it, because functionally . . . it is our god.
 - a. Could be your job. Could be your relationship. Could be your possessions. Could be sex. Could be food.
 - b. For the chief priests and the scribes it was power and political position. They were worried that Jesus was going to stir up the crowds and the Romans would come and "take away both our place and our nation" ([John 11:48](#)). That's why they want to kill Him. "He threatens our place in this world."

- c. For Judas, as you probably know, it was money. “[T]hirty pieces of silver” (Matt 26:15), equivalent to about four months’ wages for a common laborer (about \$7500 in modern terms).
 - i. Do you have a number? An amount the devil could dangle before you that would make you think twice about staying faithful to Jesus?

- C. It’s idolatry, that’s how the devil gets in, through the stuff of this world, that he tempts us to make more important than the Creator of it.
 - 1. It’s what Jesus wouldn’t stand for in the wilderness. But it’s what we fall for all the time.

- D. You know, some of you probably heard about Carl Lentz the most recent celebrity pastor to fall from his post. He was the pastor of Hillsong there in New York. And in the New York Times article, the author was talking about the culture and ministry philosophy of Hillsong churches in general.
 - 1. Brian Houston, the guy at the helm over all of these churches, has one key rule for any of his leaders who will be preaching and things. He says a Hillsong sermon “leaves people feeling better about themselves than they came.”

- E. Sounds like a nice philosophy on the surface of it until you realize that many times Jesus Himself preaches in the Scriptures to the opposite effect: people would go away mad or sad.
 - 1. You remember the rich young ruler? Jesus says: “Go sell all you have and give it to the poor and come follow me” and the guy can’t do it, he goes away sad. Why? Because his heart was attached more to his stuff than to Jesus.
 - a. And because Jesus loves this guy, because Jesus knows idols are the way demons get inroads into our hearts, He calls him on it, He tells him to let it go.

- F. And sometimes that’s going to happen in this church.
 - 1. My job isn’t to make you feel better about yourself. My job is to get you saved. And if that means upsetting you sometimes in truth and in love, well then so be it! The devil gets in through your idols. Lay them down!

(3) Why He Enters

- A. On this I’ll have to be quick. Bottom line: Satan enters to destroy. That’s the aim. That’s the endgame.

- B. In Rev 9:11, John identifies him as the angel of the abyss and says: “His name in Hebrew is Abaddon [= Destruction], and in Greek he is called Apollyon [= Destroyer].” Destruction and Destroyer. That pretty much sums it up.

- C. But we see it here right? How does the story end for Judas? Matt 27:3-5: “³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of

silver to the chief priests and the elders,⁴ saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' They said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself.'⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself."

1. Satan promises to fill but he leaves you empty. He promises to give but he takes. He promises the abundant life but he kills.
- D. You know there's two other names given to Satan that I found quite intriguing when put together. He's called "the Tempter" (1 Thess 3:5) and also as we've seen "the Accuser" (Rev 12:9-10).
1. And I thought the interplay of these two names is very interesting, and it's probably something like this that happened to Judas.
 - a. Because you see first the devil tempts you to sin, and then once you've taken the bait, he turns on you, he accuses you for it, and he tells you there's no going back, God wouldn't ever take you back, you're too filthy, you're with me now, there's no returning home. He tempts you towards sin and then he accuses you for giving into it.
- E. Some of you may be dealing with this sort of thing even right now. He's trying to tempt you, he's trying to accuse you, he's trying to destroy you.

So What Do You Do?

- A. So what do you do? How do you get out of this? How do you break free?
1. I'll tell you how: Christmas.
- B. Look back at the text I read to you at the start of all this in 1 John, only this time let me keep reading, 1 John 3:8-9: "⁸The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God."
1. Jesus born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago was ultimately about Jesus being born in you and I here and now.
 - a. Jesus lives the live we should have lived, dies the death we should have died, and when He rises from the dead three days later, triumphant over Satan, sin, and death . . . He breaks the trance of the Tempter, He overturns the case of the Accuser, He destroys the Destroyer.
 - i. He is born and dies for me, so that I can die and be born again in Him. He gives me new satisfaction, new power, new freedom, new life!
- C. So later, 1 John 4:4: "[H]e who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." And later still 1 John 5:4: "⁴[E]veryone who has been born of God overcomes the world." And, finally, 1 John 5:18: "We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."

1. So how do you resist and overcome the devil?

- a. While there is much more we could say, it certainly starts here: You flee by faith to Jesus, the only One who ever did resist and overcome the enemy and the One who promises to do it once more only now in and through you!

D. I hope you see it, just how different Jesus is than Satan, just how much better.

- 1. I said Satan looks so good but He's wicked. He promises to give but he only takes. He offers life but kills you.
- 2. But Jesus, He looks like nothing—a baby in a manger—but He's everything. He says you've got to lose it all for His sake you gain the world. He's killed on that cross, but that becomes the very source of your life. Merry Christmas!