

The Revd. Harry Williams, Dean of Trinity College in Cambridge, England recalls an experience he had during WWII coming back for a night to his college, and running into the great intellectual and agnostic, Bertrand Russell. Seeing he had on a clerical collar, Russell kindly began the conversation with a topic a clergyman might be interested in. "Tell me" he said, "are Christians still obliged to believe in the Devil?" Revd. Williams was young at the time and a bit overwhelmed by Russell's reputation but he mustered up enough courage to say, "Christians would regard your disbelief in the Devil as one of his greatest triumphs."

But an interesting thing has been happening since that time with regard to belief in a personal devil. One public opinion poll indicated that belief in the devil has gone up, in the U.S., from 37% to 48% <sup>between ~ 1974</sup> since 1964, with another 20% half-persuaded that he exists. On the other hand, the proportion of those claiming to believe in God has gone down from 77% to 69%. If these two trends continue the devil might one day out-poll God in credibility. This eruption of belief in the devil shouldn't really surprise us who remember something of the horror of seeing pictures of Buchenwald and Auschwitz following the allied liberation of those death camps, or those terrible photographs from Nagasaki

and Hiroshima where thousands of civilians were evaporated in a twinkling of an eye. When we think of international terrorism, the slaughter of innocent fetuses, and the expanding nuclear arms race who can think of the Devil merely as a myth. Who can fail to hear the beating wings of darkness in all this. Even depth psychologists are taking seriously the power of the demonic in human behavior.

Now my sermon is not an attempt to get you to believe in a personal devil, but to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ who has come to destroy the works of the devil. Now you may want to argue sometime with me whether or not there is a personal devil but all of us know from personal experience this power of evil that's there to separate us from God and eternal life. Robert Louis Stevenson says something like this in one of his books. "You know the Waverly Station in Edinburgh?" he asks. "One cold, East windy morning I met Satan there." He never tells us what the experience was. But most of us could parallel that experience in our own lives late at night and alone or in a time of emotional crisis.

The Scriptures tell us at least three things about the works of the devil. First, Jesus said that the devil was a murderer from the beginning. One of his works is to kill and destroy. He worked in the heart of Judas to betray

Lord to his death. He goes about as a roaring lion seeking to devour us as well. The devil is the power who is out to ruin us. He's out to separate us from God and to rob us of eternal life. But the devil is a very subtle fellow. He doesn't come after us out of the darkness with a long shiny knife raised in his hand to kill us. He is more like that ingenious woman who was recently accused of murdering her third husband, after taking out a large insurance policy on him, by slowly increasing doses of anti-freeze in his nightly glass of Vodka. The devil is that power of darkness that appears to offer us a thrilling life in a James Bond paradise or a fantasy island. He promises us lots of fun, but the fun ends eventually in futility and despair and death.

There is a moving poem by the English poet John Betje-man, It tells of an aging and dieing woman who had once enjoyed the good life with her many wealthy lovers. She says,

When Boris used to call in his Sedan<sup>a</sup>,  
 When Teddy took me down to his estate,  
 When my nose excited passion,  
 When my clothes were in the fashion,  
 When my beaux were never cross if I was late;

There was sun enough for lazing upon beaches,  
 There was fun enough for far into the night.  
 But I'm dying now and done for,  
 What on earth was all the fun for?  
 For I'm old and ill and terrified and tight.

You see, the devil is that alluring power that offers you life, thrills, satisfaction-- now. But these are only bait to hook you for the future. And it is a very long future, filled with futility, despair, and a dreadful sense of loss, in which you merely exist in a tormented state like the woman in that poem. The devil is out to murder us, to destroy us.

Secondly, our Lord tells us that the devil is a liar and the father of lies. He lied to our mother Eve in the garden of Eden. He still lies to us today. There is a delightful passage in one of C.S. Lewis's books that illustrates how the devil works so hard to deceive us. You may be familiar with the "Tales of Narnia". In The Silver Chair we see the good prince Rilian of Narnia along with two earth children and Puddleglum the Marshwiggle who is a good but odd and pessimistic creature with webbed feet like a duck. All of them are in a deep cave where the dreadful Queen of the Underland rules. She appears to be beautiful but she is really a witch who tries to deceive all who enter her realms into believing that the world above her dark cave doesn't exist, that there is no land of Narnia, that there is no Aslan the lion who rules over his domain with justice and love. She plays her harp and sings her songs and argues with

the good prince. The only world there is is her dark cave. There is no sun shining in the sky. There are no stars. It's all a dream and Prince Rilia is not even a prince. She almost succeeds in devdeiving them all when Puddleglum stamps out the enchanting burning incenses with his bare webbed feet. The spell is broken. The beautiful queen of the underworld is transformed into what she really is, a hideous serpant whom the Prince kills with his sword.

The devil, like the witch in that story, works to deceive us about the reality of heaven, of God, of the forgiveness of sins, of the shortness and uncertainty of our earthly lives. He wants us to believe that this world is all there is and that you better grab all you can now because you only go round once. He does not want us to believe that we are created in God's image and, as a race, destined for glory. The devil lies to us and deceives us into thinking and acting like we are merely animals.

Thirdly, the devil is our accuser. Satan is a word that simply means "adversary" in Hebrew. Devil is the english form of the word diabolos. And diabolos is the normal Greek word for a slanderer. Satan, or the devil, is our accuser, our adversary, the one who slanders us. Think of him as a prosecuting attorney who present to God all our sins, points out every occassion where we have broken God's laws and argues

for our condemnation. He says to God, the judge, "You don't want this miserable sinner. Why do you want to save this good for nothing person who does not love you and who breaks your laws?" The devil not only argues against us before God, he also accuses us and lies about us. He wants to degrade us. He wants to humiliate us. He wants to rob us of our dignity. He wants us to grovel throu life like the demon possessed man who lived among the tombs. He slanders us. He tells <sup>us</sup> us, "You don't really believe in Jesus Christ. You don't really have saving faith. You don't really love God. God doesn't want to forgive you. He wants to send you to hell." He harasses us when we don't pray as we ought. He depresses us and makes us question God's graciousness to us. He is an expert in quoting the law of God to us and a master at producing feelings of guilt, which we bemoan without coming to Christ for forgiveness.

These then are some of the works of the devil. But the good news is this. Jesus was born to destroy the works of the devil.

If this is true than the tributes given to the devil by many sincere Christians should fill us with repugnance. The way some Christians talk about the devil one might think he were omnipotent or omni-present. But the devil is a finite

He is not all powerful. He cannot be everywhere at once. We give him too much credit when we speak of him as being alive and well. The Bible tells us that he is sick and dieing.

We so often hear someone say, "The devil made me do it." We shouldn't be so quick to give the devil credit for activities than he deserves. Robert Schuller, in his latest book, tells us that the "devil would love to get credit for any success he can claim. The last thing a Christian should do is to honor the devil by giving him what he wants-- public credit for all our sins: <sup>& the sins of the world,</sup> Let us instead honor Christ by affirming his positive control over our lives, thereby making the powers of the devil impotent and ineffective. <sup>Remember, in the world</sup> Remember, "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." The devil is clever. There is nothing he'd like more than to see us try to shift the responsibility for our sins neatly onto him." Then we could so easily avoid the real act of constructive repentance.

If this is true, that Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil then a second thing is also true. Evil is doomed. The power of the devil to bind us and to deceive the nations is coming to an end. When the seventy disciples returned to Jesus from a preaching and healing tour into the

surrounding villages their faces were aglow and triumphant. "Master," he cried excitedly, "Master, it works-- this new power that has been given to us-- it really works." And then, the gospel writer tells us Jesus said to them, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." And in the parable of the binding of the strong man Jesus compared himself to one who came to bind up the strong man, the devil, and rob him of his possessions, the souls of men and women. Benjamin Britten writes, in his Ceremony of Carols, what the gospel says,

This little Babe so few days old,  
 Is come to rattle Satan's fold;  
 All hell doth at his presence quake,  
 Though he himself for cold do shake;  
 For in this weak unarmed wise  
 The gates of hell he will surprise.

Do you know, as you sit here this morning, that Jesus has come to destroy the works of the devil in you? If this morning you are in the grips of the forces of evil, if you realize that in your life his works are the things of strength, then I urge you to call up <sup>^</sup>Him who was manifested to destroy the works of the devil. He came two thousand years ago as a baby, he comes now to you in the preaching of the Word. He comes to the gate of your life and mine today. He is the **risen** Lord who has come to destroy the works of the devil. Behold; He stands at the door and



knocks. What will your answer be? Will you let the devil murder your soul, deceive you, and slander and accuse you into thinking that God cannot or will not break down the doors to your heart, that he is not gracious towards you, that he doesn't love you? Or will you not, rather, say, "Batter my heart, three personed God." "Come now. My life is yours. Bind Satan in my life. Take your rightful place on the throne of my life. O Christ, take your power-- and reign!"

AMEN