**“Rescue in Motion”**

Genesis 3:1-21

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

 Lent 1

“As by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous. Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to Him.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

While reading of Satan’s demonic oppression of Jesus in the wilderness, I’m also preparing for an upcoming conference on that very **same topic**, reading two books assigned on **current** **affairs** in demonic oppression and possession / spiritual warfare and how people today let evil spirits attack and even prevail and overwhelm them. Robert Bennett (the pastor and missionary who’s speaking at our conference) has first-hand experience in this vast area, seen it graphically himself and has further researched this first by being fully confronted with it in the African island of Madagascar … but then, also, here in America.

His first book (published in 2013) was called “I Am **Not** **Afraid**”, and it describes the Satanic / demonic issues considered “business as usual” on that African island with animism and a spirit fascination and Deism (addressing what people think are their ancestral spirits) rampant, with exorcisms necessary and, at least, momentarily-successful in convulsing out Satan’s partners in the regular evangelism of the church. Exorcistic rites are, then, **standard procedure** for Madagascar pastors so his book “I Am **Not Afraid**” describes preparedness and victories in the name and Words of Jesus. He having overcome Satan is there used for battle and seen and unseen evil within and around people is cast out from wherever it hides or shows itself in people, places or things.

But Reverend Bennett is an American pastor only **befriending** and **learning from** the bishop and pastors in Madagascar. He **came home** to, then, research and tell the story of **American spirituality** and called his book on **that**, this time, “Afraid” (published three years after the first book). I’ve always heard that what **we, here, consider** **neutral** (call it “superstitions” but think nothing of them) is, really, **far from that** **… Satanically demonic**, and **never innocent**. “Afraid” chronicles how we **should be**, being most often **unconscious** and, certainly, **ill-prepared** **to engage the battle that’s necessary** to combat the seen and unseen evil that oppresses (or sometimes, even possesses) **where we are**. It has been largely subtle here in America. But likely (in, now, a **post-Christian** culture more like Africa’s **pre-Christianity**, yet maybe **more dangerous** because of our turning away from God after having worshipped Him) **more blatant and obvious in our days to come**.

So far, Satan’s best tool **here** has been **unbelief** … unbelief particularly **in him** appears to be an American epidemic. The George Barna Research Group reports that (among American Christians who they chronicle) many don’t believe in the **problem of Satanic evil** … or any **solution to it**. And while we might question research, these surveyors have been (for over 30 years) the “go-to” group that track the faith and its role in America, having conducted (regularly) over a million interviews that cover hundreds of questions of study … and do-so to provide insight into trends of culture and faith, and generational movements in all of that.

About our text for today (for instance), they record that the facts and characters of these accounts aren’t that-believed even among Christians, and trends (they find) are making that situation worse, not better. Bennett’s “Afraid” writes of his concern, then, with Satan’s success in his use (so far) of his best weapon (an **unbelief in him** or **doubt**, so **no thought really about** **the issue** so an **unpreparedness or unwillingness to, then,** **contend** **against him**. The Barna Group find that, currently, 2/3rds of those who say they’re Christians reject the reality of the personalness of Satan. Some (half of those) acknowledge **an evil spirit world in some gross generality**, but they don’t believe it organized under **him** as **the** **him** **of completely evil design**. Bennett’s **worried** (even “**Afraid**”) of **America’s denial** so **unpreparedness**.

And, then, there’s an entirely other part to that: apparently only about half of us Christians believe **Jesus won (by obedience) victory over Him (Satan)**, being guiltless in the face of temptation so as to be the pure, then, sacrifice necessary, sufficient for our sins upon His cross. 50% of interviewed Christians think Jesus gave in to temptation. The “sinless Lamb of God” may not have been so sinless (half seem to believe), so not so able to have defeated evil for any substantial benefit to us.

And Adam and Eve have taken their believability hits as (I’ve heard) many reject them as nothing much more than a **mythological “representative” of mankind**, the “fall into sin” considered far less than **a historically-significant reality**, humanity sugar-coating an only-slight lacking that we’ve fallen into rather than the tragic result of a **real-life decision (causing everyone’s demise) when the first of our own were tempted toward it by Satan himself**.

**Text**

But the **accounts** have been given to the world. We just heard them again, and the “fall” and the “in motion rescue” present stark contrasts from each other in outcome, the degree of their contexts, the people involved, and the decisions made. Adam and Eve (human) weren’t (for instance) hungry and wandering a wilderness when they were tempted. Jesus faced hardships and was brought to the point of desperation first by the Holy Spirit’s intent. Adam and Eve were in Eden, granted everything (a garden rich beyond imagination and pleasant beyond description, Good by every definition of it, and they had it). They (for however long) lived sumptuously and blessedly there, pure and sinless they were (and created that way) perfect and without interest in sinning till **deciding to**, giving in to the same kind of temptation that God’s Son, Jesus, got thrown His way (tested fully, though, and beyond what they ever were). But He endured by necessity, stayed tested-out sinless and pure (perfectly obedient) though tempted well past what they were (and all the way to the end).

Jesus got driven to the wilderness for **that** test: “After fasting forty days and forty nights, He **was hungry**. **And the Tempter came**”. But “**Rescue**” was “**In Motion**” because **what happened in Eden began to be fully OVERTURNED … right there in the domain of Satan (the wilderness of this earth)**.

And Jesus dealt with (on earth) many of the created angel who’d followed Satan to become the fallen demons. “He cast out demons with a Word”, Matthew accounts. “Two men, demon-possessed, met Jesus in the country of the Gadarenes, coming out of the tombs, crying out at the presence of Him, ‘What have You to do with **us**, O Son of God? Have You come to torment **us** before the time?’” He cast them out into pigs, who rushed, then, down the banks and into the sea, drowning in the waters, finally “proclaiming victory to the captives” in **Hell** following the completion of that “Rescue” mission on a cross.

**Application**

So, what does all that mean for us? First and foremost, it means that we have a champion Who’s defeated Satan and his hoard (He created them / He’s the Creator). Where He (Satan and all demons) are just fallen **pieces** of creation, Jesus is **Creator of all things**. And since He took our lowliness, yet won over Satan even that way, **so can we**, ourselves resisting temptation because **He did**. He paved the way for us, giving us the tools, showing us how, and equipping us with Himself and the same Words that He used to overcome Satan where He was.

But we must **be prepared to us those Words** and **engage in the battle**. Paul, to the Ephesians, made sure that it was an important component of who Christians are. He wrote (in Romans) of the **benefit** **of our Lord’s victory**, but of **preparedness and duty in it** to the Ephesians: “**be strong in the Lord and the strength of His might**. **Put on the whole armor of God**, that you may be **able** to stand against the schemes of the devil, Satan. For we 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**.”

Lent is a critical time of **warfare with Satan**. Everyone’s drawn to the facts of Jesus’ victory over him when crucified, so it’s **when Satan wants most to distract or just gut truth, faith, righteousness, and the very Word of God listened-to**.

But **hear** those Words: “The free gift is **not like the trespass**. For as many died through one man’s trespass (Adam and ours with him), **much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many**.” But “**be sober-minded**; **be watchful**. Your adversary the devil (Satan) prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. **Resist him, firm in your faith**, in +Jesus’ name. Amen.”