

NAME

above All

NAMES

SAMPLE CHAPTER
NOT FOR RESALE

N A M E

above All

N A M E S



ALISTAIR BEGG AND
SINCLAIR B. FERGUSON

 **CROSSWAY**
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Name above All Names

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To
Derek Prime—
Christian
Pastor
Example
Encourager
Friend
With Affection and Gratitude

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Preface



This book, as its title suggests, is a brief exposition of what Christians often refer to as “the person and work of Christ.” Its focus is on some of the different ways in which the Bible portrays Christ’s identity and describes his ministry. The chapters are by no means exhaustive. They cover only seven of the many descriptions of Jesus found in the Bible, and none of those descriptions is treated exhaustively. So these pages are meant as a taster, a beginning exploration. Our joint prayer is that they will help some who are not yet Christians, be an eye-opener to those who already are, serve as an encouragement for mature believers, and be a pleasure for all who love Christ.

We cannot claim that this is a “special” book. But there are two special things about it that may lend interest to reading it.

For one thing, it is a concrete expression of a friendship, begun in the 1970s when we were both very young ministers in Scotland, that now spans five decades. We were born and lived the first years of our lives in the same city. We knew the same places, were taught the same psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, heard the same preachers, developed a network of mutual friends, and, yes, even supported the same soccer team and played on some of the same golf courses. We both came to minister in the United States within a few months of each other, in 1983.

Of course we are different personalities and live within our

own worlds (one has become an American citizen, the other hasn't; one plays the guitar, the other doesn't; one is a Baptist, the other a Presbyterian; one lives in Cleveland, the other in Columbia; and so on). We both have our own circle of friends as well as intersecting circles of friends. But over these many years we have enjoyed the kind of friendship, esteem, and affection for one another that has made us feel we are brothers. One of us never had a brother; the other lost his brother. So in part this book and its theme are expressions of our joint gratitude to the Savior in whom we have enjoyed such friendship and the love for his people we share in common.

But in addition, *Name above All Names* gives us the opportunity to do something we have talked about over the years: express in some tangible way our joint gratitude for Derek Prime, who has been to us model pastor, friend, and encourager. That would be true especially for Alistair who served with Derek Prime at Charlotte Chapel, Edinburgh, from 1974–1976. Our sense of gratitude for the measure of Christ-centeredness and Christlikeness we have seen displayed in his life and ministry makes it very natural for us to dedicate to him this little book on our Savior and Lord.

The material in these pages began to come together in its present form as we prepared for a conference at The Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee. We are indebted to that congregation and to its senior minister, Sandy Willson, for giving us the opportunity to serve them together and to share some of the material here in spoken form. We are also indebted to Mrs. Eve Huffman for the secretarial help without which this project would never have been completed.

We hope these pages will encourage, instruct, refresh, and challenge every reader. In order to make it more practically helpful to those with only a beginning knowledge of the Bible, we have included references to the Bible passages or texts to which we refer. These references are in footnotes so that the book may be read without the constant interruption of bracketed material.

We ask one favor from our readers. Standing in various pulpits in our native land of Scotland we have often seen words visible to the preacher but hidden from the congregation: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus” (John 12:21). We ask you to make that your prayer as you begin to turn these pages.

Alistair Begg
Sinclair B. Ferguson

Jesus Christ, the Seed of the Woman



Jesus Christ has been given the name above all names.¹ The names assigned him begin in Genesis and end in Revelation. Taken together they express the incomparable character of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Reflecting on them better prepares us to respond to the exhortations of Scripture, to focus our gaze upon him, and to meditate on how great he is.

Being able to think long and lovingly about the Lord Jesus is a dying art. The disciplines required to reflect on him for a prolonged period of time and to be captivated by him have been relegated to a secondary place in contemporary Christian life. Action, rather than meditation, is the order of the day. Sadly, too often that action is not suffused with the grace and power of Christ.

How different is the example of the apostle Paul—for whom “to live is Christ”²—or the author of the letter to the Hebrews, who urges us to “consider Jesus.”³

We need to learn to recapture such Christ-centeredness in our activist, busy age. Many of us are by nature too impatient. The most common tools of life, used on a daily basis—our computers and all of our technology—simply increase that impatience.

¹Phil. 2:9.

²Phil. 1:21.

³Heb. 3:1.

It can only do us good, then, to spend the few hours it will take to read these pages focused on and riveted to the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The beginning, as Julie Andrews reminds us, “is a very good place to start.” Genesis is the book of beginnings. There we find the first hint of the coming of a redeemer. He is the Seed of the woman.

In the Garden

The title of this chapter is drawn from words God spoke in the garden of Eden. He addressed the Serpent that had just successfully tempted Adam and Eve into sin:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring [seed] and her offspring [seed];
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.⁴

The context is a familiar one.

God has put Adam and Eve into a beautiful garden. Every tree in that garden is good to look at and its fruit tastes delicious. But there is one tree in the garden about which God has said, “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you will die.”⁵

The point, apparently, was not that there was anything inherently poisonous about this particular tree. In fact, it is described in exactly the same terms as every other tree. It does not bear ugly fruit with a poisonous aroma. No. The distinctive feature of this tree is *what God has said about it*. For the all-generous God, who has given Adam and Eve everything in the garden to enjoy, has also said to them:

Now, prove your love for me, show your trust in me and your obedience to me as a generous God, not because you can tell

⁴Gen. 3:15.

⁵Gen. 2:17.

the difference between that tree and any other tree, but simply because I, as your Father, have told you, “Trust me and obey me” with respect to this one tree.

It is a call to the life of faith that runs from the beginning of the Bible to its end:

Trust and obey, for there’s no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.⁶

But then the Serpent appeared singing a different song:

Trust me and obey, for there’s no other way
To be happy without God, except—do what I say.

“Did God set you in this garden full of all these glorious trees, and all this delicious fruit, and then say, ‘You are not to eat of the fruit of *any* of the trees?’”

Of course, Eve tried to argue with him, but she failed and was eventually drawn in to his scheme. She assessed the significance of the tree through her eyes rather than through her ears! Instead of listening to *what God said about it*, she thought about it only in terms of *what she could see on it*. After all, it looked delicious as well as attractive. She had not grasped the divine principle: believers “see” with their ears, not with their eyes, by listening to God’s Word!⁷

This, of course, is always the Serpent’s trick.⁸

In addition, what better way to bring about the fall of Adam other than—as Eve herself later admitted—by deceiving her and then employing her? Satan used the very best of God’s gifts to Adam to gain leverage on him and to draw him into sin. And so, in turn, Adam brought the cosmos to ruin.

God comes and exposes the sinful pair. They make their pa-

⁶John H. Sammis, “Trust and Obey,” 1887.

⁷King David was to make the same mistake (2 Sam. 11:1–2).

⁸See Josh. 7:18, 20–21; 2 Sam. 11:2 for further illustrations in the cases of Achan and David.

thetic excuses. The man blames the woman. The woman blames the Serpent.

Then God pronounces three words of judgment.⁹

1) There is a judgment on Adam related to his task of gardening and his calling to turn the whole world into a garden for God.

2) There is a judgment on Eve related particularly to childbearing and to her attitude toward her husband.

3) There is a judgment on the Serpent.

Amazingly this judgment on the Serpent contains a seed of glorious gospel hope:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring [seed] and her offspring [seed];
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.¹⁰

Emmaus Road Reading

When we trace the way the Old Testament develops this theme, we are, in a sense, trying to catch up with Jesus himself as he talked with two of his disciples on the road to Emmaus on the afternoon of his resurrection.¹¹ We are trying to overhear what he said.

The disciples were confused, bewildered, and distressed because of Jesus' death. He pointed them to the Scriptures: "Do you not see how these Scriptures show that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise again and enter his kingdom and then extend that kingdom to the whole world?"

Apparently they didn't.

How much we would love to have been there with an iPhone or a Blackberry set to RECORD to be able to play back all the Old Testament passages to which he drew their attention. He clearly had them memorized! Presumably he simply worked his way through

⁹Gen. 3:15–17.

¹⁰Gen. 3:15.

¹¹Luke 24:13–35.

them on that short journey.¹² Later, for a period of several weeks, he kept coming back to the disciples and showing them all the ways in which the Old Testament pointed to him.¹³

When our Lord Jesus did this—and whenever he still does it through his Word and by his Spirit—three things happen:

- First, he provides an *exposition* of the Scriptures.
- Second, he brings *illumination* to the mind.
- Third, he creates a *passion* for himself in the heart.

“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?”¹⁴ That was the reaction of the two disciples when he left them.

This is the function of any Bible study. It is what we want to happen whenever we read what the Bible has to teach us about Jesus. We read or hear the Scriptures, and we look to the Holy Spirit to illumine them. When he does, our hearts burn within us. They are “strangely warmed” (to use John Wesley’s words). If we have once experienced this kind of heart burning, we want our hearts to burn like that again and again with love for the Savior and his teaching.

If that is to happen, there is no better place to start than where we suspect Jesus made his beginning, in Genesis 3:15—here in this promise of the conflict between the two seeds.

The antagonists are first described as the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent. But the climax of the conflict is destined to be more personal and individual—between the seed of the woman and the Serpent itself. The final evil antagonist is no longer the seed of the Serpent but the Serpent itself. Implicitly, then, the final seed of the woman is also an individual. Each would crush the other. But whereas the Serpent would crush only the heel of the

¹² Luke says, “He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27; see also 24:44–47).

¹³ Acts 1:3.

¹⁴ Luke 24:32.

seed of the woman, the seed of the woman would crush the head of the Serpent—a blow that would prove fatal.

If we were to give you a 3x5 blank card, inviting you to answer the question, “For what reason did the Son of God appear?” what would your answer be? Here is the apostle John’s answer:

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.¹⁵

That is the very first dimension of the gospel recorded in the Bible. John saw the prophecy of Genesis 3 fulfilled in our Redeemer Jesus Christ. When Christ appeared, he came to undo what the Serpent had done. By his life and ministry and ultimately through his death and resurrection, he destroyed all the works of the Devil.

How do these words illumine the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ?

When we think about salvation, we use words like *forgiveness* and *justification*—and rightly so. But notice that there is no mention in Genesis 3:15 of forgiveness or justification. Does that not matter? Indeed it does! But God’s words here place all the emphasis on conflict (“I will put enmity . . .”) and therefore on our need to be delivered from bondage to the Evil One so that we are no longer the prisoners of “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.”¹⁶

And so these words, almost at the beginning of Genesis, give us an important insight into the whole message of the Bible. It is a library of books that traces an ages-long cosmic conflict between the two “seeds.”

The Protevangelium

Genesis 3:15 has long been referred to as the “Protevangelium,” the first announcement of the good news of the gospel. It contains the

¹⁵ 1 John 3:8.

¹⁶ Eph. 2:2.

earliest promise of Christ's coming—a prophecy that his appearance will be the climax of an extended conflict. Notice how this is expressed:

- a) I will put enmity between you and the woman,
 - b) and between your offspring and her offspring;
 - c) he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.
- In the first statement (a) God declares enmity between the Serpent and the woman.
 - In the second statement (b) God indicates that this will continue beyond the lifetime of Eve and involve the offspring (seed) of the Serpent and the seed of the woman.
 - In the third statement (c) God says that the enmity will come to a climax when the offspring (“he”) of the woman bruises (or crushes) the head of the Serpent. The conflict ends in the victory of the seed of the woman.

So there is a development in this verse, from enmity between two individuals (the Serpent and Eve), to enmity between two family lines (their offspring), to a final dénouement: the woman's offspring or seed (singular) will crush the head of the Serpent.

Satan?

There is no reference to Satan in Genesis 3. But when the rest of the Scriptures reflect on what happened there, it is clear that behind the Serpent stands the figure of Satan.

Paul echoes Genesis 3:15 when he tells the Christians in Rome that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”¹⁷ He is picking up this ancient promise and applying it to the Christians in Rome. The implication is that the Serpent in Genesis 3 is the mouthpiece of Satan, and that the conflict referred to there has now come to a climax. Christ overcomes him—and therefore so shall we.

¹⁷Rom. 16:20.

This is even more vividly expressed in the book of Revelation. Revelation 12 gives us a dramatic picture of this ages-long conflict reaching its climax. John sees a great red dragon that devours humanity. This is the “ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.”¹⁸ Having spiritually devoured so many from the human race, the Serpent of Eden has grown into a large dragon.

In fact, the apocalyptic vision of Revelation 12 is almost like a movie version of Genesis 3:15. We are invited to watch, in dramatic, high-definition, Technicolor with special effects, the prophesied ongoing conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent and its final outcome.¹⁹

This is the underlying plotline of the whole of the Bible. It appears in embryo in the very next chapter of the book of Genesis. One brother (Cain) is in conflict with another brother (Abel) because the latter’s sacrifice was acceptable to God.²⁰ Jealousy and murder result as the seed of the Serpent (Cain), seeks to destroy the seed of the woman (Abel).

The same plotline makes its way through the tower of Babel as man seeks to build his kingdom over against God’s. But in sovereign power God pulls down that kingdom and destroys its unity.²¹ This is also the story of Egypt against Israel.²² It is the story of Goliath against David.²³ It is the story of Babylon against Jerusalem, of Nebuchadnezzar against Daniel.²⁴ It is the story of Satan against Jesus,²⁵ and of Pontius Pilate and Herod seeking to destroy the Savior.²⁶ It is the story that runs through the Gospels and be-

¹⁸ Rev. 12:9.

¹⁹ Elsewhere, by implication, the New Testament makes this same identification of the Serpent with Satan: John 8:44b.

²⁰ Gen. 4:1ff.

²¹ Gen. 11:1–9.

²² Exodus 1–12.

²³ 1 Sam. 17:10, 45.

²⁴ Dan. 1:1ff.

²⁵ Matt. 16:21–23; Luke 4:1–13, 28–29, 31–37; 22:53; John 12:27–33; 13:2, 21–32.

²⁶ Acts 4:23–28.

yond. The Jews seek to destroy Jesus during his ministry: “You are of your father the devil,” he says.²⁷ It is the story of how the enmity then turns on the Christian church.²⁸

Thus the story of the ages is beginning to unfold here already in Genesis 3:15.

Ongoing Conflict

We need to remember this conflict when we come to read the Gospels. It is a major underlying theme in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. Its presence runs through every page of the story. The Gospels are the story of Jesus’ conflict with the seed of the Serpent—whether in the form of demons, or in the inciting of hostility against him, or in his efforts to conscript into his service Jesus’ disciples Peter and Judas. In the terse summary language of the aged John: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”²⁹

And so from the beginning to the very end, from the garden of Eden turned into a desert because of sin, until in Revelation 21 and 22 when that desert is turned back into a garden, the whole of the Bible is the story of this conflict. It was promised to last throughout the ages until Christ came, and then, in his ministry, it enters its critical phase.

The New Testament reflects this in many different ways.

Remember how Paul says that when the time was fully come, God sent his Son. He describes Jesus in two arresting phrases, “born of woman, born under the law.”³⁰ “Born of woman”—is he echoing Genesis 3:15? Surely, for lineage elsewhere in Scripture is traced through the male line.³¹ But God had said, “The *seed of the woman* will crush the head of the serpent.” Paul is, as it were, say-

²⁷ John 8:44.

²⁸ Acts 7:54–8:3.

²⁹ 1 John 3:8.

³⁰ Gal. 4:4.

³¹ See, for example, Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; Matt. 1:1–17; Luke 4:23–38.

ing to us, “Now do you see in the incarnation *who* the seed—the one born of—the woman actually is? It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Could this be the reason why the Lord Jesus addresses his mother Mary as the “woman”? He does that in two very striking moments recorded exclusively in John’s Gospel.

First, at the wedding Jesus was attending in Cana of Galilee, he responds to Mary’s insistence that he “do something” about an impending disaster. The wine was running out. But Jesus answers: “*Woman*, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” But shortly afterwards he turned water into wine—his first miracle; his first display of his glory!³²

Later, during the last hour or so of his life, Jesus again addresses his mother as “woman.” He is about to finish his work on earth. In that work God “disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame.”³³ As he does so, he turns to John and commits his mother Mary into his care. And then he says to her, “*Woman*, behold, your son!”³⁴

Commentators have always found it difficult to explain the precise nuance of Jesus’ words. They seem to jar a little. After all, when did you last address your mother in this impersonal form? And if you did, what did she say? Did she remind you who she is? To our ears there is something abrasive about such language when used by a son of his loving mother. Some commentators go to great lengths to say, “Now, there is no tension here. This is a very normal thing for Jesus to say.”

But is it? This style of address between a son and his mother does not appear elsewhere in the Gospels. Could there be a deeper reason why John records this language at both the beginning and the end of Jesus’ public ministry? Is he saying: “Don’t you see what

³² See John 2:1–11.

³³ Col. 2:15.

³⁴ John 19:26.

is happening here? Jesus sees he is *the seed of the woman* who would bruise the head of the Serpent.” Is he simply reminding his mother of their God-given destinies? After all, John’s Gospel teaches us that, on the cross of Calvary, our Lord Jesus Christ did, in fact, crush the head of the Serpent. “Now” he says, when Gentiles asked to see him, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.”³⁵

Jesus Meets the Enemy

Another passage in John’s Gospel seems to fit in with this overall perspective, although it too is far from easy to interpret.

In the middle of our Lord’s Farewell Discourse (John 13–17) he says to his disciples, “Rise, let us go from here [or, let us be going]” (14:31). But there is no indication in the text of any physical relocation or indeed of any movement at all. However, the language John uses here was employed outside of the New Testament in a military context, for marching against the enemy. Perhaps, then, Jesus is not saying, “Come on, let’s move on from here,” but rather, “In the light of all that I have been saying and all that is happening, it is time for us to march into the final conflict against the powers of darkness.”³⁶ For, “this is [their] hour, and the power of darkness.”³⁷ Whether the disciple band physically left the room at that point or not, Jesus was certainly entering enemy-occupied territory.

And so the Gospels seem to be saying to us: “Do you see in the ministry of the Lord Jesus how this promise of conflict is coming to a climactic point?”

Revelation 12 is a dramatic form of this promise of Genesis 3:15. In his vision, John sees that a child who will rule the nations

³⁵ John 12:31.

³⁶ See John 14:31. See C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 407–9.

³⁷ Luke 22:53.

is about to be born.³⁸ But a great dragon stands waiting for him to come from his mother's womb. The dragon means to devour the child. The dragon is explicitly identified with the Devil and the Serpent in Eden.³⁹ This is all too reminiscent of the vicious and cynical pogrom Herod mounted against the infants in the region of Bethlehem.⁴⁰ There was something deeply satanic about that attack, focused as it was on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The story of salvation is a wartime story.

The same realities come to expression in our Savior's temptation in the wilderness.⁴¹

The Second Adam Comes to the Fight

We sometimes make an elementary mistake when reading the temptation narratives. We assume that their chief purpose is to teach us about *our* temptations and how we should resist them.

True, our Lord's example of resisting his temptations does help us to withstand our temptations. But their point is not to say, "Jesus was tempted, and you are tempted just like him, so respond to temptation as he did." That would turn his temptations into a mere example for us to emulate. No—we are told that the Holy Spirit *led* Jesus, indeed "drove him," into the wilderness to be tempted.⁴²

Jesus' temptations were not a series of unfortunate events that overtook him unexpectedly. They constitute an epic confrontation taking place within the divine strategy. What we see here is Jesus' work of conflict, victory, and salvation. He came face-to-face with Satan. He appeared as God's new man, the second Adam, to do what the old man, the first Adam, had failed to do. The question is:

³⁸ His language makes clear that he sees this child through the lens of Psalm 2:9. He is the promised messianic King.

³⁹ Rev. 12:9.

⁴⁰ Matt. 2:16–18.

⁴¹ Matt. 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13.

⁴² "Led" is Luke's expression; "drove" is Mark's.

who will possess the kingdoms of this world? And how will God's kingdom be recovered and established? And the answer is that Jesus will repossess them in our name and for his Father's pleasure and glory. Satan will be crushed under foot!

O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
A Second Adam to the fight
And to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood,
That did in Adam fail,
Should strive afresh against the foe,
Should strive and should prevail.⁴³

This is why Jesus experienced such overwhelming weakness and hunger (in contrast to Adam, who enjoyed plenty). This is why he faced temptation in a wilderness (not like Adam, situated in a lovely and hospitable garden). This is why he was surrounded by wild animals (not, as Adam was, by pliant, obedient, almost domesticated animals). Jesus, the Last Adam, had to conquer in the context of the chaos the first Adam's sin had brought into the world.

So from the beginning of his ministry to its end, Jesus is marching against the powers of darkness. Virtually immediately after the temptations, as he begins his public ministry, he has to face a further onslaught of demonic activity in the Nazareth synagogue.⁴⁴ Soon afterwards he encounters a man in Gadara whose life is under some destructive alien influence and out of control. He roams through the tombs like a wild animal nobody can subdue.

Jesus says tenderly to the demoniac, "What is your name?"
He replies, "My name is Legion, for we are many."⁴⁵

⁴³ J. H. Newman, "Praise to the Holiest in the Height," from the poem *The Dream of Gerontius*, written in 1865 and later set to music by Edward Elgar for his oratorio of the same name.

⁴⁴ Luke 4:16–30.

⁴⁵ Mark 5:9.

A Roman legion theoretically consisted of around four thousand to five thousand soldiers. The man is saying, “Thousands of demons have invaded my life.”

But catch this. It takes only one demon to destroy a man. Why, then, have thousands of demons invaded him? Because the Lord Jesus was there. That is the whole point. This is not simply a poor man possessed by a legion of demons. That would be an extravagant deployment of forces Satan could never afford. No, not this man, but the destruction of Jesus’ ministry is the ultimate target.

The reason there is so much demon possession in the time period recorded by the Gospels is not—as is sometimes assumed—that demon possession was commonplace then. In fact it was not. Rather, the land then was demon-invaded because the Savior was marching to the victory promised in Genesis 3:15. And all hell was let loose in order to withstand him.

The response of the demons themselves to Jesus makes this clear. When he was confronted by the demon-possessed man in the Capernaum synagogue, the unclean spirit’s reaction to him was “Have you come to destroy us?”⁴⁶

And then, of course, this sinister opposition took a more subtle form in one of the three men Jesus loved most in the world, when Simon Peter echoed the Serpent’s temptation of the Savior: “Don’t take the way of the cross, Jesus.”⁴⁷

How resolute Jesus was—how clear-headed to hear in Peter’s words the accent of the Evil One—and to respond: “Get behind me, Satan!”⁴⁸

A Change of Tactic

In the first half of the Gospel narrative, up to the point where Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, Satan seeks to divert him

⁴⁶ Mark 1:24; cf. Matt. 8:29, “Have you come to torment us *before the time*?”

⁴⁷ See Matt. 16:22–23.

⁴⁸ Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33.

from the cross. In the wilderness he says, “Jesus, don’t go to the cross. I will give you the kingdoms as long as you will bow down and worship me.” Through Simon Peter he says, “Don’t go to the cross. Find some other way.” The demons seem to say, “Don’t go to the cross.”

Then something unexpected happens. Satan’s strategy moves into a different gear. Now he tries to get Jesus to the cross as quickly as he possibly can. Now he is attempting to subvert God’s timing so that Jesus’ death will be a terrible tragedy, not an obedient saving ministry. Now, instead of using an unstable member of the disciple band (Simon Peter), he uses its trusted treasurer (Judas Iscariot). Indeed his fellow disciples trusted him so implicitly that when he left the upper room to betray Jesus, several of them consciously thought that he was going to engage in mercy ministry.⁴⁹

Satan had used Simon Peter—unsuccessfully. But now he actually came to indwell Judas Iscariot.⁵⁰ That signaled the beginning of Jesus’ final conflict. “This” he said to his captors in the garden of Gethsemane, “is [your] hour, and the power of darkness.”⁵¹ That power would crush his heel. But in that conflict he would crush the head of the Serpent.

So the whole-Bible story is one of ongoing conflict. The Gospel story brings us to its crisis point.

Victory

How does Jesus crush the head of the Serpent and destroy his influence?

Where Adam conceded victory to Satan, Jesus resisted him. Total obedience to his Father marked the whole course of his life.

Three years later, Jesus was also brought to a tree. He too faced temptation. But in his case the temptation was to *not* eat of its poi-

⁴⁹ John 13:29.

⁵⁰ John 13:27.

⁵¹ Luke 22:53.

sonous fruit. The obedient Last Adam reversed the disobedience of the first Adam.

God gave Adam and Eve the pleasure of eating fruit from every tree in the garden, except one. The forbidden fruit, as we have seen, was not an ugly fruit that looked sinister and gave off a repulsive odor. No, it looked delicious. Every instinct said, with respect to that tree, “This tree—like all the trees in the garden—is attractive to the eyes. Its fruit looks and smells delicious.”⁵²

Why, when the tree in Eden looked so attractive, had God said, “Do not eat this fruit”? The tree tested Adam’s obedience. But it also provided a context in which he could grow in his relationship to God. For God was really saying to him: “Adam, obey me in this to show you trust and love me. By doing so you will grow in your relationship with me.” Alas, Adam followed in the pathway on which his wife’s senses had led her: sight, smell, and taste rather than the word of God.

When the second Man was brought to the Calvary tree, he faced a reversed mirror image of the first man’s temptation.

There was nothing in the first tree that led Adam instinctively to resist the temptation to eat its delicious-looking fruit. So there was nothing in the second tree that attracted Jesus to eat its repulsive fruit of God-forsakenness. It was an accursed tree.⁵³

There was not a bone in Christ’s body, not an ounce of his flesh, not an affection in his soul that could ever be instinctively willing to experience a sense of abandonment by God. Everything in him shrunk from that. He loved his Father!

We can say more. Any other reaction than to shrink from death on the tree as repulsive would have been less than holy on Jesus’ part. Jesus was called to experience something from which every instinct in him recoiled. Jesus had to *NOT want to eat* the fruit of the tree with his whole being, and yet be *willing to eat*. He willed

⁵²See Gen. 2:9.

⁵³See Gal. 3:13.

to be obedient when he did not want to be forsaken! Such was the price of our salvation. No wonder Jesus prayed, “Abba, Father. . . . Remove this cup from me.”⁵⁴

We can tabulate the contrast between Adam and Jesus in this way:

Two persons:	Adam the first	Adam the last
Two places:	The forbidden tree	The accursed tree
Two commands:	Do not eat the fruit!	Drink what is in the cup!
Two desires:	Wants to eat	Does not want to drink
Two actions:	Disobedience	Obedience
Two results:	Death	Life

It is against this background that Paul says, “He . . . [became] obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”⁵⁵ Jesus willed to take the divine curse although everything in him, every holy desire, longed for and deserved the divine blessing. He took our place—who can fathom the mystery of his sense of desolation and alienation from heaven’s glory? He bore the curse—all for love’s sake.

In my place, condemned he stood
Sealed my pardon with his blood
Hallelujah! What a Savior!⁵⁶

But there is more. Jesus did something else of massive importance.

The Unmasking

Jesus unmasked Satan’s lie.

Paul describes the fall of man in these terms: “They exchanged

⁵⁴ Mark 14:36.

⁵⁵ Phil. 2:8.

⁵⁶ Philip Bliss, “Man of Sorrows,” 1875.

the truth about God for a lie.”⁵⁷ What was this lie? This, surely: the Serpent said to Eve:

Your God has set you in this garden. He has given you so many rich and attractive trees, so much luscious fruit. But he is really saying: “I am surrounding you with all these beautiful and delicious things *BUT you are not to have any of them.*”⁵⁸

Do you see the satanic innuendo here? “God is cynical; he does not want the best for you, nor does he give the best to you. He is toying with you for his own malicious pleasure. He doesn’t really love you. He despises you.”

The rest is history. Eve struggled with the temptation, but the poisonous thought was already injected through her now-confused mind into her affections and will. From there it has passed down into our bloodstream. It is in our system now. It is the twist within us that leads us not to believe and not to trust that God himself and everything—absolutely everything—he is, does, says, commands, and promises is good.

Sometimes non-Christians say to us, “The God I believe in is a God of love.” But they do not know themselves. For the Bible’s analysis is: “No—you have exchanged the truth about God for a lie. You don’t believe that he is love. You wouldn’t live the way you do if you really believed that.”

The heart of the gospel is: in demonstration of his love, the heavenly Father sent his only Son to die on the cross in our place and for our sins. “God demonstrated his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”⁵⁹

It is the cross alone that ultimately proves the love of God to us—not the providential circumstances of our lives. We must not

⁵⁷Rom. 1:25.

⁵⁸See Gen. 3:1ff.

⁵⁹Rom. 5:8.

allow ourselves to be tricked into thinking that *if* things are going well with us, then we can be sure of God's love. For life can often seem dark and painful. Things do not always go well for us. Rather, we look to the sacrifice of the cross and the demonstration God gave there of his love. This is the proof I need. This is the truth I need to hear if the lie is to be dispelled.

If Jesus has died for me, then I can be sure that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit will stop at nothing (absolutely nothing!) to do me good:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?⁶⁰

Notice how Calvary-oriented, cross-focused, and Christ-centered the gospel is. But Calvary, with all its dark sense of abandonment, is an even fuller revelation of grace. For it is not only

1) The high point of Jesus' obedience. He became "obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."⁶¹

It is also:

2) The high point of the Father's love for his incarnate Son. "For this reason the Father loves me," Jesus said, "because I lay down my life."⁶² The moment he cried out, "My God, I am forsaken! Why?" was the very moment that his Father, through his tears, was singing,

My Jesus, I love thee,
I know thou art mine . . .
If ever I loved thee,
My Jesus, 'tis now.

⁶⁰ Rom. 8:32.

⁶¹ Phil. 2:8.

⁶² John 10:17.

All of this took place in order to crush the Serpent's head and to squeeze from his fangs the poisonous lie that still deadens many a Christian's heart, and causes us to become fearful, doubting believers.

There is one further note to add that seems to shed light on Christ's work as the seed.

The Gardener Returns

Recall what Adam was created to be: the gardener.

Everything God made was "good"—but everything was not yet garden. God wanted Adam to exercise his dominion by expanding the garden. Having given him a garden to begin with, God was saying: "Now, Adam, I have given you a start." Just as we might say to our children, "Here is a start. Now you go and do the rest."

Adam was to "garden" the whole earth, for the glory of the heavenly Father. But he failed. Created to make the dust fruitful, he himself became part of the dust.⁶³ The garden of Eden became the wilderness of this world. But do you also remember how John's Gospel records what happened on the morning of Jesus' resurrection? He was "the beginning [of the new creation], the firstborn from the dead."⁶⁴ But Mary Magdalene did not recognize him; instead she spoke to him "supposing him to be the gardener."⁶⁵ Well, who else would he be, at that time in the morning?

The gardener? Yes, indeed. He is the Gardener. He is the second Man, the last Adam, who is now beginning to restore the garden.

Later that day Jesus showed his disciples where the nails and the spear had drawn blood from his hands and side. The Serpent had indeed crushed his heel. But he had crushed the Serpent's head! Now he was planning to turn the wilderness back into a garden. Soon he would send his disciples into the world with the good news

⁶³ Gen. 3:19.

⁶⁴ Col. 1:18.

⁶⁵ John 20:15.

of his victory. All authority on earth—lost by Adam—was now regained. The world must now be reclaimed for Jesus the conqueror!

In the closing scenes of the book of Revelation, John saw the new earth coming down from heaven. What did it look like? A garden in which the tree of life stands!⁶⁶

One day all of this will come to pass.

So the Seed has come; his heel oozed blood from being crushed. But the Serpent's head has been crushed in the process. Jesus reigns, and we will be more than conquerors through him who loved us!⁶⁷

But there is still a long way to go before the end; and there is much more to learn about Christ if we are to know him fully. Already we have had hints of what he will need to be: someone who speaks the truth that counters Satan's lies, that is, a prophet; someone who is able to assure us that our sins are forgiven, that is, a priest; and someone who is able to subdue us and reign over us, that is, a king. And much else.

⁶⁶ See Revelation 21–22.

⁶⁷ Rom. 8:37.

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