

Revelation 12:7-12

⁷ And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. ⁸ But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. ⁹ The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. ¹⁰ Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. ¹¹ They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. ¹² Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, you have ordained and constituted in a wonderful order the ministries of angels and mortals. Mercifully grant that, as your holy angels always serve and worship you in heaven, so by your direction they may help and defend us here on earth; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day: Psalm 103:20

Alleluia. Praise the Lord, you his angels, who obey his word. Alleluia.

Sermon Text: Mark 10:2-16

WAR IN HEAVEN! That's the headline that would have been front and center on the first page of the New Jerusalem Journal if such a thing existed, if the Book of Revelation were a not a picture book summarizing the whole of the New Testament Era, the time in which we live right now. So what's going on here?

Well WAR IN HEAVEN but likely not the first place our minds would travel with such a statement. This is not the first great rebellion of Satan and the rest of the demons as this section of Scripture is often interpreted. And why? Well, look at that song that they sing after Satan is cast down, “*Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.*” ¹¹ *They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.* ¹² *Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.*”

This is not the first rebellion but the rebellion that has been raging ever since. It is the spiritual war that has been waged against God and His people throughout time from the fall until Christ's return. It is an irrational war, fought by a foe who is unable to win. For Christ has already overcome Him by His own blood and through His powerful Word. It is a war simply waged to cause pain and destruction and to drag as many people as possible into the pit of hell where Satan (the great dragon) and His demons will suffer for all eternity.

But perhaps I get a bit ahead of myself. Let's back up for a moment. Yes, Revelation is a giant picture book. By its own word, it is an intricate revelation or vision that was given to John while he was exiled on the Island of Patmos. This means, that if we take Revelation literally, we need to understand the pictures behind the vision that John receives. If not then there will literally be a giant dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems on each head that will storm the halls of

heaven. But of course, even in our lesson today, John dispatches such a notion and tells us this massive serpent who commands power (horns) and would demand worship (diadems) is none other than Satan himself (v9). So one of our pictures and key players in the war is demystified.

The main character of course may very well be the One who bests him, Michael. We hear of Michael a few times in Scripture. In Daniel's visions (much like Revelation), He is chief of the angels (10:13) and your Prince (10:21). But consider also the name Michael and what it means in the Hebrew language "Who is like God?" It has led more than one Lutheran commentator (Luther, Stoethardt, and Becker) to conclude that Michael may well be a regular picture of Jesus Himself and if so then our picture begins to take shape rather quickly.

Satan and Jesus lock horns in an epic spiritual battle with demons and angels gathered round. Commentators have sometimes pictured the war of words so often seen in Scripture (consider the temptation in the desert, the casting out of demons, the depth of suffering and the poignant words of the cross). But Satan was not strong enough, an understatement of epic proportions, and Christ and His angels overcome ... cross, empty tomb, ascension, they all crown our Savior as victor and His people as saved for all eternity. And just like that, the song in our lesson starts to make a whole lot more sense.

Ah, but there is a warning here. Satan was irrational when he thought he could best the Creator of all created things and he remains irrational in defeat. Though it will change nothing for him, he continues to rage in our world seeking to inflict as much damage on the creation God has wrought as possible. So why not go after the crown of creation? Why not attack humanity in as many ways as possible, sometimes subtle sometimes blatant?

The thought is enough to cause feeble humanity to shudder. We are not angels, superior in power and intellect. We are not spirits, so often unseen in their attacks, their temptations against us. They took down our perfect ancestors Adam and Eve with seeming ease and scary speed. What chance do you and I have against such foes?

Well, our last several weeks in worship have been preparing us for just such opposition. Brothers and sisters, Satan does prowl around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, looking for us. We have often proved easy targets from Eden until the end in the pages of God's book. But God places His armor, the armor of the Word upon us, within us as He prepares us for battle. He calls the attacks of Satan and his demonic forces as He warns against pride and guides us with His Law. And today, He reminds us of the allies who stand beside us.

Though we may not see them, they surround us on the hills as they did Elisha. They tend His people when the battle grows fierce and the fight seems long. They wage wars which will forever be unseen as they stand perfectly in skirmishes which don't end up in papers or heralded in the news. Confirmed in their righteousness, they will not fail. God's special forces, His elite warriors battle with us.

Oh but then do not forget that there is one even more powerful than they who fights alongside of them and us. One who can dispatch demons and their dreadful dragon with a mere but mighty command. Christ fights for you! God is on your side! The Creator bleed and died for you. He rose again that victory might surround us, going before and following after us. He sits in throned in heaven guarding and guiding His Church for all eternity.

Brothers and sisters, we may well be locked in a war. A war in which the stakes have eternal consequences. But we have the best of allies at our side fighting that we might remain safe in a war that is already won! Amen!