

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today we're going to talk a lot about Satan and demons. Before we get too far, though, I want to directly address the question that might be on the minds of some of you. Is Satan real? Are demons real? Isn't that Dark Ages type thinking? Haven't we grown and matured in our 21st century world to just dismiss this teaching all together? There are many who have. Satan and demons are mere symbols or illustrations of evil and sin. Many Christians today have stopped teaching the literal truth of such beings.

But I want you to know that here at Good Shepherd, we are old fashioned. We still believe that the Bible is true. And so we say unequivocally, that yes, Satan is an actual being and so are the demons. They are spoken of in every part of Scripture. Jesus is confronted by them multiple times during his ministry. If you consider Scripture to be the authoritative word of God, then you will believe that angels and demons are real beings.

Where did they come from? Angels: Since God made all things, God made the angels too. The Bible speaks of them witnessing God's creating activity, so they must have been one of the first things if not the very first thing God created. God create only good angels. He created them as spirit-beings... they have no body, but they occasionally take on bodily form if God so wills it. The word angel means "messenger" so God created them to do his bidding. Scriptures also tell us that one of the things he commands the angels to do is to protect believers. So that concept of guardian angels that protect us... that is a Biblical concept. They are an invisible presence guarding and protecting us at God's command. Note, however, that they serve God and listen to God and do God's will. They do not listen to us or do our bidding. It is pointless to pray to an angel, or try to command an angel. Neither will do any good.

So where did Satan and the demons come from? The Bible says that there was a great rebellion in the spiritual realm. Satan, one of the head angels, although he was created good and holy, decided that being under God and subservient to God was not desirable. He craved independence. He craved equality with God. And so he rebelled against God and led many other angels to do the same.

Pause: So God made some of the angels imperfect and flawed, and that's why they rebelled? No. God made them perfect, but with a genuine free will. They were in no way pre-programmed to only obey God. They could choose to obey him or rebel. God did not make the angels robots who had no choice. He made them capable of rebellion if that what they chose to do. And some of them did. We can't blame God for this. At best you can try to argue that free-will was a mistake. But even there, you're going to have a hard time proving that a bound, pre-programmed will is better than a free will.

We're not told a great deal of detail about this rebellion... just that they were unsuccessful. And they were cast out of heaven where they no longer have power or influence. In the spiritual realm they do no harm to God, no harm to the good angels, and not even harm to the souls of believers who are now with the Lord. They are powerless in that realm.

However, they do still have power and influence here in the physical realm, here on earth. When Satan successfully tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God, he found allies. And he still tempts people to his side every day.

Satan is very powerful. Satan is very cunning and intelligent. But please also understand his limitations. Is Satan all powerful like God? Most definitely not. Where God draws a line, Satan cannot cross. God has complete power over him. We, however, do not. If we are to withstand Satan and his temptation, we absolutely need God's power and God's armor which God provides to us.

Another common question: Does Satan know everything? And can Satan read our minds? The answer to both of those questions is "no." He is not omniscient, only God is. He cannot read our minds, only God knows what is in our thoughts. However, is Satan a master of reading human beings? Yes. Does he know where are weaknesses are and just how to tempt us? Absolutely. Along those lines, I personally found a book by C.S. Lewis particularly useful. It's called the Screwtape Letters. It can help you become more aware of the constant scheming and plotting that the devil and his demons are doing to get to you to sin. They are very smart, and they understand our human natures very well.

You are constantly being tempted by Satan to abandon God's side and go to his side. Now that brings us to the main point we want to consider today: **Whose side are you on?** In the eternal scheme of things, you are on one of two sides. You are either on God's side or Satan's side. There are no other sides and there is no neutral territory. A person may say, "I'm not picking either side. I will be the master of my fate and captain of my soul." Fair enough, but understand that when you say that, you have clearly demonstrated you are in Satan's camp, not God's camp. You are following his ideology to the tee if that is your philosophy, so you aren't as free and independent as you might think.

So whose side are you on? Now you might be thinking: "Whose side am I on? Really? I'd understand if you were standing at the entrance of HyVee asking strangers that question. But I'm in church! It's clear what side I'm on, isn't it?"

Okay, with that logic, wouldn't we also have to say that it's clear what side Jesus' family would be on? They must be on his side, right? And wouldn't it be logical to conclude that in Jesus' day, those who knew the Bible best... they must be on his side, right? Let's listen to today's reading, and we'll see that for me to ask the question, "Whose side are you on?" is a very legitimate question.

Mark 3:20-35 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Wait a minute! Who thought Jesus was out of his mind? It says, "His family." They saw Jesus in a house and the house I jam packed with people so much so that Jesus and his disciples couldn't even eat. There must have been people pressing in tight from every side. Jesus' family saw this and thought this was madness. They conclude that Jesus had lost his mind. He no longer had a good grasp on reality. We read on:

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebub! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

"Beelzebub" means "Lord of the flies." It was a mocking term used for Satan in Jesus' day. But note who thought Jesus was possessed by the devil? The teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem. These weren't just the local religious leaders. These were the smartest of the

smart... the ones from Jerusalem. They couldn't deny the fact that he was driving out demons. They saw it with their own eyes and there were countless eye witnesses. Since they couldn't deny the fact, they denied the power. "Yes, he's driving out demons, but it's with the power of the Satan he drives out demons."

So before we answer the question whose side we are on, don't we have to demonstrate whose side Jesus is on? If his family thought he was crazy, and the smartest religious minds thought he was on Satan's side, is Jesus really on God's side? Jesus answers.

So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.

1) Logic: How can Satan drive out Satan? He'd be fighting himself and that would certainly not advance his aims and purposes here on earth.

In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house.

2) The fact that Jesus can drive out demons shows that he is the strong man with power of Satan. We talked earlier about how Satan has significant power, though he is not all-powerful. He is very cunning and intelligent, although he is not all-knowing and cannot read his mind. But as smart and powerful as he is, Jesus is able to effortlessly drive out demon after demon. They immediately yield to him and are unable to oppose him. Even when Jesus was greatly weakened from 40 days of fasting in the wilderness, after three failed temptations, Jesus finally says to Satan the chief of all the demons, "Away from me!" And what happened? Satan immediately obeyed, and left Jesus. What does this tell you about the power of Jesus? He can rob Satan's house whenever he wants, and Satan is powerless to stop him. Jesus has all power. This, by the way, is another passage that demonstrates that Jesus is true God.

3) Now Jesus turns the tables on those teachers of the law. After demonstrating clearly that he is on God's side, he questions them on whose side they are on.

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

Jesus speaks of a sin that cannot be forgiven. It's blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. This is a teaching many have questions about. What exactly is this unforgiveable sin? Is it possible I have done it? I'll briefly explain. The sin against the Holy Spirit is one where you willfully and intentionally refuse the faith in Christ that he desires to create in your heart. It's more than just unbelief, it's hardened unbelief.

Maybe an illustration will help. I remember once as a child my older sister and I were fighting. We didn't always get along the best. I don't remember why, but once she was trying to get into my room, and I wouldn't let her. She was pushing on the door, but I was holding it shut. "Let me in!" She was screaming. "No!" I replied. She pushed and pushed, but I held tight. I was feeling good about myself because I was stronger than my sister. She shouted louder and got more and more angry, but she couldn't get the door open. Suddenly it got quiet for a second... then the door was pushed again. "No!" I shouted. "You can't come in!" A deep, authoritative voice sounded from the other side, "Michael, it's your father. Open the door NOW!" I immediately stopped resisting and he flung the door open. I was in big trouble. But what do you think would have happened if, knowing who I was keeping out, I continued to hold the door shut? Or what if I

locked it on my dad? What if I shouted back, “I don’t care if you want in, father, I’m not opening the door! And I never will!” That would be an entirely different story, wouldn’t it?

Blaspheming against Jesus is like holding the door shut, not fully understanding who you’re opposing. This would describe the apostle Paul before his conversion. He was fighting against Jesus, but Paul didn’t realize that Jesus really was who he said he was! So as the Holy Spirit tried to create faith in his heart, he held the door shut. But then Jesus himself appeared to him on the road to Damascus one day. Paul suddenly fully realized that Jesus was indeed who said he was. At that moment, Paul stopped resisting, and in walked the Holy Spirit to create faith in his heart.

But what if Paul at that moment still resisted Jesus? What if he locked his heart and would not let the Holy Spirit in to create faith? That would have been the sin against the Holy Spirit. With full knowledge and in spite of what was clearly revealed, if then he would have refused and rejected, that would be a sin that cannot be forgiven. It’s unforgivable, because sin can only be forgiven when there is faith in Christ. Faith in Christ only exists where the Holy Spirit works in a person. And if a person knowingly refuses the faith the Holy Spirit seeks to create, what more hope can there be for the person?

So Jesus here has turned the tables on the teachers of the law. He essentially told them, “I am on God’s side. It’s logical and it’s evident. Yet you are refusing to believe. So whose side are *you* on? You are dangerously close to locking yourselves out of the kingdom of God forever since you are locking your heart to the Holy Spirit.” *It is possible to permanently be stuck on Satan’s side, even while you are still alive on this earth. It’s a horrible fate, and so Jesus warns sternly about it.*

Okay, let’s wrap this up: **“Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”**

Jesus’ family were not like the religious leaders. They were temporarily confused. We know they later came around and believed in Jesus.

But let’s get back to the question of the day: “Whose side are you on?” And again, it’s not attendance at church that puts you on one side or the other... although it does have influence. It’s not a knowledge of the Bible that puts you on one side or the other. I know atheists whose knowledge of the Bible exceeds my own in certain places. So who is the one on Jesus’ side? **“Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”** The ones on God’s side, the ones on Jesus’ side are the ones who listen intently to his word and believe it. They are the ones who then do the will of God, because that’s what a follower of Jesus does.

So whose side are you on? The one on the side of God submits to God. He recognizes God’s authority over all things, including every aspect of his life. The one who is on God’s side, recognizes his own unworthiness to be there. He is aware of his sins, faults and failings. He has despaired of self, and sought God’s solution. The one who is on God’s side has heard the good news from God, that the Strong Man who cast out demons and rebuked the devil after 3 grueling temptations, is also the one who crushed Satan’s head by suffering and dying on the cross for the sins of the world. The one on God’s side rejoices that God’s own Son won the victory over Satan and proved the victory through his resurrection on the third day. The one on God’s side now rejoices in God our Savior by yearning and striving to do the will of God in daily living.

Friends, open your eyes and see the raging battle that's taking place all around us. We're at war. And it's your soul and the souls of others that are at stake. So trust in the one who gives us the victory. Trust in the strong man who rescues you.

With might of ours can naught be done;
Soon were our loss effected.
But for us fights the valiant one
Whom God himself elected.
You ask, "Who is this?" Jesus Christ it is,
The almighty Lord. And there's no other God;
He holds the field forever.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill;
They shall not overpow'r us.
This world's prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none. He's judged; the deed is done!
One little word can fell him.