

Sermon Series: Unshakeable

Building our lives on the promises of God

#3 The Devil is Done For – 1 John 4:1-11, John 16:33

Intro

What is on **shaky ground** in your life right now? Is it your future, or your present? Your faith, your family, or finances? Or is it the state of the world?

Life is sometimes filled with **problems**. God's Word is full of **promises**.

Like secure **anchor** points relied upon by a rock climber on a mountain face, God's promises give the assurance you need to make your journey to the top of the mountain we call "life". Today we look at the **second** of **nine** great promises of God in this sermon series. Jesus said,

"In this world you will have trouble but take heart! I have **overcome** the world¹." (John 16:33)

Here, Jesus promises his followers that he is the "overcomer" of evil. God's promise in Christ is that evil **has** and **will** be **conquered**.

Another battlefield?

In our passage from 1 John 4 today, Christians are "overcomers" of evil because Christ is at work in them. Competing voices of visiting religious leaders threatened the unity of many in the early days of Christian churches. 1 John 4 encourages Christians to test the "spirits", that is: discern whether the voices seeking their attention were of God or not.² In verse 4 we read...

"You, dear children, are from God and have overcome [spirits opposed to God], because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

¹ In the Johannine writings "world" often refers to the state of the world order due to sin.

² No one is called to believe "just because". In fact we are warned to carefully "weigh" up what is taught in community before we trust (e.g. Acts 17:11, Col. 2:8-10, 1 Cor. 14:29)

Even religious teachers can be **instruments of the evil one**³, as history has sadly proven many times. And this evil one spoken of in the bible may be God's **adversary**, but **not** Christ's equal.

Sometimes the biblical writers pull back the **curtain** behind the stage on which human life is taking place.

For example, Ephesians chapter 6:12-14 says...

"Our fight is not against people on earth but against the rulers and authorities and the powers of this world's darkness, against the spiritual powers of evil in the heavenly world.¹³ That is why you need to put on God's full armour. Then on the day of evil you will be able to stand strong. And when you have finished the whole fight, you will still be standing.¹⁴ So stand strong..."

There is something beyond our sight at work behind the great evils that humans perpetrate on one another. But, in Christ, we can be confident that God has given us the means to **navigate good and evil** and **stand firm** in faith.

The world, the flesh, and the devil

I don't know what your take is on the existence of the Devil or Satan. Such a heavenly being is **presented** to us in Job, **prophesied to us** by the likes of Ezekiel and Isaiah, is **prominent** in the Gospels as accuser and opposer to Jesus, and is defeated in the **visions** of The Book of **Revelation**.

Perhaps the bible's language and imagery may seem **antiquated**, even arcane to you. Nevertheless, we are those who believe in the Creator of all things "**seen**" and "**unseen**". Regardless of the ancient nomenclature (e.g. "devil" "demon" "satan" "heavens") used in the bible and its simple metaphors relating to realms of good and evil (e.g. "light" "darkness"), the truths about Christ's supremacy over evil and ultimate victory over same should not be discarded because of our dislike or discomfort with the medium.

Even today's scientists marvel at how much is **yet to be seen** and understood in the cosmos! We do well to take a humble approach what we see and know.

³ Note the references to "Antichrist" in 1 John - 1:7, 2:18, 2:22, 4:3. The title of Antichrist is given to those who deceive others by denouncing that Jesus is the Christ, or as 1 John 4:2 clarifies, those who deny that Jesus was God come to earth in the flesh (ie God incarnate).

C.S. Lewis once wisely warned of two **equal and opposite dangers** for Christians when thinking about the Devil.⁴ He wrote “You can dismiss [the Devil] a being as ludicrous, with horns, hooves, tail and all [the first of two equal and opposite dangers]... or you can take an **unhealthy interest** in all things diabolical...”

Where do you sit on that spectrum? Are you someone who rarely, if ever, pays any regard to praying for God to save you from the Evil One’s influence? Or, on the other hand, are you someone who tends to see the Devil’s hand in every setback you face?

According to a post-pandemic survey in the USA, a **whopping 44%** of people surveyed in the pews believed⁵ the notion that “Satan is responsible for most of the suffering in the world.”⁶ I doubt we would find very many people in Australian churches today who think this way.

My own view is that evil and suffering is complex indeed, and I don’t look conclude too quickly that the Devil is at work when suffering or setbacks occur. Yet, I do believe that Christ’s death for sins has **cosmic consequences**, and that there is a bigger, unseen battlefield between good and evil that God has included in the plan of salvation Jesus’ proclaimed.

The ancient ones gave a great variety of names to a personified evil being at various times in biblical history. Some examples are shown below...

Devil (accuser)	Satan (adversary)
Strong one	Serpent
Lion	Tempter
Wicked one	Ruler of this world
Fallen angel	Prince of the power of the air
god of this age	Beelzebub
murderer	Belial

In the face of oppression God’s people of old longed for a Saviour of **cosmic capabilities**.

No doubt many suffering in Ukraine and Myanmar today long for an end to evil that seems even bigger than the present atrocities

they are experiencing. The concept of the “Evil One” should not be foreign to baptised Christians. After all, we are those who renounced “...the world, the flesh, **and the devil.**”⁷ We do well not to be ignorant of the promise of Jesus

⁴ *Screwtape Letters*

⁵ <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/11/23/few-americans-blame-god-or-say-faith-has-been-shaken-amid-pandemic-other-tragedies/>

⁶ Protestants in the evangelical and historically Black traditions especially likely to take this position.

⁷ Sure, the language comes from the late 2nd Century AD. Yet, you were initiated into a faith that believes in the existence of spiritually personified evil presented in the Bible.

that He is **the conqueror over evil**. Regardless of how our views on the Devil of the Scriptures might differ in the pews, all Christians should look to the testimony that Jesus is evil's conqueror with hope and confidence.

The Cross is crucial

The New Testament gives **comfort** and **courage** in the cross of Christ. It tells us that through Jesus, the Devil is a **defeated foe**.

Jesus' earthly ministry **began** with spiritual temptations from "the devil" in the wilderness. It **ended** with Jesus declaring just before his crucifixion, "Now shall the ruler of this world be cast out" (Jn. 12:13). 1 John 3:8 goes further, saying, "...the reason the Son of God appeared [was] to destroy the works of the devil."

The key to Christ's conquering of evil is the cross! Paul writes in Colossians 2:15 "[Christ] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them..." Paul goes on to tell how God **cancelled the debt of our sins** by **nailing them to the cross**. This is the key to taking away the means of any heavenly or earthly accusers who wish to point to our sins and keep us distant from God. We can say two things with great confidence:

1. Because of the cross, there is "now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1), and
2. Because of the cross of Christ, the **Devil is done for** (John 16:33)

What to do

The victory over evil is evil, sin, and death is assured⁸, but promised peace and wholeness as a result is still to come with Christ's promised return. In the meantime, we have the help of the Holy Spirit. 1 John 5:3-5 frames our current journey trusting in Jesus in these words...

"In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

⁸ 1 Cor. 15:57

The bible offers other **tips** for the journey with confidence in Christ as evil's conqueror:

1. **Expect evil.** "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Peter 4:12).
2. **Endure** evil. "Love bears all thing, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7; see also Mark 13:13).
3. **Hate** what is evil. "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Romans 12:9).
5. **Pray** for God's help. "Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).
6. **Expose** evil. "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead bring them into the light" (Ephesians 5:11).
7. **Overcome** evil with good. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).
8. **Resist** evil. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

We do well to remember that:

- the cross of Christ gives us both **comfort** and **courage** in our trials,
- the pattern of Jesus' humility, patience, love, and faithfulness is a guide for us, and all humans to follow, and
- the Spirit of the Living God is our promised helper on the journey.

Let's build our lives on this great promise of God in the Bible. Jesus said...

"In this world you will have trouble but take heart! I have **overcome** the world." (John 16:33)