

Jesus' Kingdom Movement

The Gospel of Matthew

Jesus Frees Us from the Evil One

Matthew 3:13 – 4:11

Given July 1, 2012 in a prison for men called Remand Home in Pece, in Gulu, Uganda

Introduction: Alberto in East Palo Alto, CA

Alberto* was a young husband and father who would randomly go into seizures. You would be talking to him, and suddenly he would slump in his chair or go rigid, and stop interacting with you. He went to see a doctor about this condition. There was no medical explanation. My friends Keith and Lawrence would pray for him. He would momentarily come out of his seizure and speak in a mocking voice. Turns out that Alberto, in a moment of frustration, had once cursed his infant daughter, wished her dead, and she died. He was pierced through with guilt and anger. And from that point on, he started to go into these seizures.

Relevance: Spiritual Warfare

Some of you have said that you've been in the bush with the rebel army of Kony. You were forced to kill and do terrible things. After you came back, you started having terrible dreams and hearing terrible voices. I want to explain why Jesus is essential to your healing. There is a spiritual war happening. You know there is because you've seen hints of it everywhere. I want to give you the full story.

Joseph Kony and his rebel army is a good analogy or parallel to the spiritual war. Kony didn't just want land. He wanted people. That's what made the LRA so terrible. We didn't want to fight people, especially children. We wanted to fight for people, for their freedom. Similarly, Satan has a rebel army. And he wants people on his side. But God loves the people he's taken into his army. So God does not want to just crush the rebellion.

You might wonder why Satan rebelled against God. When God created the angels and then humans, God wanted the angels to love people and serve us. We see that in Psalm 91 and 1 Corinthians 6. But Satan refused to love people. Instead, he thought that he could prove that human beings were weak, corruptible, and able to sin. So he tricked Adam and Eve to sin against God and corrupt their own hearts. From that point on, human beings have had a weakness in our hearts to rebellion. But God didn't reject humans as Satan had hoped. Instead, God started to redeem us. That's why Satan is furious. God's love for us is stronger than Satan thought. Even though all humanity lies in the grip of the evil one, God has sent His Son Jesus right into his rebel camp. Jesus is bringing us back to the right side, God's side, to the side of the God of love. Jesus is helping us rebel against the rebel. How is he doing that? That's what I want to talk about.

Context: Matthew's Gospel

I'm going to look at Matthew's Gospel like I did on Friday. Matthew's Gospel is a training manual Jesus gave us through one of his disciples, Matthew. At the end of the book, Jesus tells his disciples to teach others what he taught them. One of the things Jesus taught was the spiritual war, and how to come to his side, and how to help others do the same.

The passage I'm going to read comes from the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. This is the first direct battle between Jesus and Satan, and the beginning of Jesus' victory over the evil one.

There are two things Jesus does to free us from the camp of the evil one. First, he cleanses his humanity so he can give us his new humanity. Second, he receives his identity from the Father, so he can share his identity with us.

Jesus Cleanses His Humanity for Us: Mt.3:13 – 17

^{3:13} Then Jesus arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him. ¹⁴ But John tried to prevent him, saying, 'I have need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' ¹⁵ But Jesus answering said to him, 'Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he permitted him. ¹⁶ After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on him, ¹⁷ and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.'

Now what's going on here? Why does Jesus get himself baptized and what does that have to do with Satan? For the Jewish people, and now for Christians, too, baptism symbolizes God cleansing a person. The imagery of water comes from how God created people in the first place, in Genesis 1. God first made water, then brought land out of the water and then put humans in a garden. When the first humans sinned and started killing each other, God preserved Noah and his family through the flood of water, and then brought them to a cleansed land and a new garden. Then, human beings sinned again, so God brought Israel out of Egypt through water, and into a garden. When someone became a part of Israel, the Jews baptized them. It symbolized God cleansing the person of sin and making them a new person, a person who had switched from Satan's side to God's side.

But why did Jesus have to get baptized? Did he need to switch sides? Be cleansed? Repent? Well, he did need to do it, not for himself, but for us. There are things we do that make us vulnerable to Satan. For example, anger can be a magnet for spiritual forces outside of us to come to us. Paul says in Ephesians 4:26 – 27, 'Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity' or 'foothold' into yourself. Carlos' anger was an open door for forces beyond his control. Emotions like anger and fear can lead us to forces that we don't understand, which will control us.

But it's more than just things we do, like give into anger. It's who we have become. There is a weakness in our humanity that makes us vulnerable to Satan. It's like all of us have a disease, a flaw, since Adam and Eve gave into Satan. Jesus took the same kind of humanity we have, disease included. Jesus never sinned against the Father. But as he went into the water of his baptism, Jesus confessed our sin – the fact that he had the flaw in himself, too. But he overpowered it, resisted it, killed it when he died on the cross, and healed it when he was raised from the dead as a fresh, new, God-soaked, God-drenched human being.

Jesus Restamped God's Writing onto Human Nature: Mt.4:1 – 11

The second part of this passage shows how Jesus rewrites humanity's true identity into our flesh. After his baptism, Jesus goes into the wilderness to battle Satan personally. The battle is for his own humanity.

^{4:1} Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he then became hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.' ⁴ But he answered and said, 'It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.' ⁵ Then the devil took him into the holy city and had him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you'; and 'on their hand they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.' ⁷ Jesus said to him, 'On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the LORD your God to the test.' ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; ⁹ and he said to him, 'All these things I will give you, if you fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, 'Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and serve Him only.' ¹¹ Then the devil left him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to him.

Satan tries to get Jesus to doubt his identity. 'If you are the Son of God,' he taunts. That happens in the first and second temptations. Why does Satan take that approach? Satan cannot create anything new. Only God can do that. Satan can only lie and deceive. He tries to make us question what God tells us. Since God is good, Satan tries to make us think that God is evil. Since God gives life, Satan makes us think that God is taking away life. Since God wants to give us an identity as His children, Satan makes us think that God doesn't do that, or that we have to earn our identity from God.

But Jesus has just heard the Father say, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.' So Jesus is not fooled. He doesn't doubt what God said. He doesn't ask God to say it again. He doesn't try to make God prove it by turning stones into bread, by using spiritual power for his own benefit. Jesus receives the word of his Father deep into his heart.

The human heart is a tablet. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said:

^{17:1} The sin of Judah is written down with an iron stylus;
With a diamond point it is engraved upon the tablet of their heart

⁹ 'The heart is more deceitful than all else
And is desperately sick;
Who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:1, 9)

The heart was meant to be written on by God, but instead, we have written sin into our hearts. When I was younger, I worked in a shop. I engraved words onto metal things: signs, bracelets, and other things. Occasionally, I would make a mistake. So I'd have to throw away the metal thing because I couldn't melt it down. God allowed us to be in charge of who we allow to engrave words onto our hearts. We listen to other voices telling us who we are, and we write those words in our hearts. Or we believe lies Satan tells us, and we write those words in our hearts. God did not throw us away. He sent His Son to grab hold of a human heart and melt it down in the fires of his love, so he could rewrite the words there. Jesus allowed God to write words on his heart, 'The Father's beloved Son, in whom the Father is well-pleased.' He received that word deep into himself. He erased all the lies of Satan. And now, he can share his own heart with us by his Spirit, when we come to him.

Illus: I have a friend named Jason*. He is a brilliant neuroscientist. So he knew very well what was happening when he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Jason and his wife thought that he would have only a little time left to live. As they prayed and looked at Jason's family's medical history, they realized that Jason's dad and grandfather had been involved in a secret society called the Masons. They had both gone deep into the occult, into the realm of the demonic. They would keep secrets, hold onto secret power, and sometimes curse people. There was a curse put onto family members who left the Masons, which Jason did. They really prayed, asking Jesus to erase the curses and words of Satan. The brain tumor disappeared. Jason's doctors said that it was a medical miracle. But just as importantly, if not more so, Jason became a very different person because of Jesus. He became the opposite of his father and grandfather in the Masons: He didn't try to hold onto secret power; instead, he wanted everyone to know the power of Jesus to heal. He didn't curse people, but blessed them. That is the best change: the change that Jesus makes in a person, which will last into eternity. Jesus rewrites what is on our hearts. He gives us what he has already received: his identity from the Father alone.

That is how Jesus comes into the enemy's camp and sets us free. He becomes one of us, to heal in himself what needed to be healed in us. And if we receive him, he becomes one with us by his Spirit, so that we can share in us what he did in himself.

The Third Temptation

In the third temptation, Satan tries to give up trying to lie to Jesus. He tries to bribe Jesus. He says, 'Come up to this mountain and look at all the nations. If you worship me, I will give them to you.' The trick here is that the Dark Lord does not share power. Jesus would become a subject of Satan just like everyone else. Jesus surely sees this, because although his path given to him by the Father is a path of suffering and death, there is resurrection and authority on the other side. Satan's way is an easy way. 'Avoid death. Just bow to me.'

Now we're a part of the healing process for all others. In Matthew 28:16 – 20, Jesus meets his disciples on a mountain. This is after his death and resurrection. He says to them, 'A new kingdom is breaking loose upon this world, and you're the first people to see it this way.' I'm willing to bet that the mountain Jesus was standing on was the same mountain that Satan taunted him with in the third temptation. Except this time, Jesus says, 'All authority has been given to me. Let's go planting churches.'