

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Various

"Checkmate!"

A CHESS MATCH UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Some years ago, a chess champion was traveling Europe with his wife. One day as they toured a famous art museum, he noticed a painting off in a corner between two hallways. It immediately caught his attention because it depicted two individuals playing chess. Intrigued, he left his wife and the tour group for a moment to take a closer look. And what he saw amazed him. On one side sat a rather sinister looking figure with a wide grin. In fact, it appeared to be the devil; and his hand was poised to make the next move. On the other side sat a young man who looked terrified. Sweat was dripping from his brow, his teeth were clenched, his face was beat red. With the young lad's soul hanging in the balance, it looked as if the devil had won. And at the bottom of the painting – the title, CHECKMATE!. The devil had put the young man in checkmate.

Just then, the man could hear his wife calling him to hurry up as their tour group was about to leave for the next exhibit; he told her to go on ahead and that he would catch up. He had to take a closer look at that painting and its chessboard. So he went to a blank page of his notebook and began to draw a chessboard with the pieces that remained. He studied the board and its pieces. He studied all the possible moves and scenarios. And then he saw it; he looked up with a great big smile and exclaimed, "Son, don't worry! You've got one more move! Your king has one more move! In fact, you even have enough moves to be able to put the devil in checkmate!"

THE KING'S ONE MORE MOVE

My friends, that's what we celebrate today; we celebrate the King's one more move. Not in a chess match, but in real life. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is God's answer to Satan's checkmate. That's right, the devil. He is real but his power is limited. He trusts in what he can see. And on that Friday that we call Good Friday, it looked pretty bad. It looked bleak. The disciples thought Jesus had lost, the Romans thought Jesus had lost, and the Jews thought Jesus had lost. And Satan, who doesn't know the future, thought Jesus had lost. But come Sunday morning, it was a different story! Jesus walked out of that grave not just as a spirit, not just as a soul; but He walked out of that tomb body, soul, and spirit! And when he called Mary by her name, she immediately knew it was the Lord. When the one disciple saw those grave clothes neatly folded, not in some heap as would be the case if someone had unwrapped the body in haste to steal it, he believed. He knew it was the Lord.

You see, with God **we always have one more move for the good**. Even in your bleakest hour, even when things look bad and there seems to be no way out, you always have one more move with the Lord. Just remember that. **ONE MORE MOVE!**

But there is something else you need to know – you've got to make that move, too. You're responsible for responding to God's move. In other words, God made the move so that you can make the move with Him! It would not be enough for the young chess player to know the moves he could make and not make them.

And this reminds us of another life truth and that's this: **everything that happens in the visible and physical world is first determined in the invisible and spiritual realm.** Let me repeat that, **everything that happens in the visible and physical world is first determined in the invisible and spiritual realm.** You see, before you can make the move in the physical world, you must make the move in the spiritual world.

Now what do I mean by that? We live in a physical world that we can experience with the **five senses.** We are greatly affected by what happens to us visibly and physically. However, there is another realm – it is called invisible for a reason. It is the world of **the mind and the heart** – the soul if you will. You can't see it, hear it, feel it, taste it or touch it. But it is in your mind, it is in your soul, and it transcends the physical world. Now it certainly can show itself with the physical but it is not first physical.

What exactly am I talking about? **Your thoughts and your desires.** And when we also speak of a soul, we also can't forget the spirit. It is in our spirit that we find things like love, faith, compassion, peace, joy, hope, fear, doubt, and so forth. Can you see such things? No. We may be able to see the results of those things manifested in the physical; we may be able to see them at work in people, but you can't see them in and of themselves. They are invisible but real nonetheless.

And now think about **human consciousness,** for a moment. Human consciousness is our **self-awareness and our awareness of others and of the possibility of another realm or world.** It is what separates us from the animal world. Animals don't know they exist. We not only know we exist, but we can understand why we exist and study and see the universe with all its parts. We can take information and process it and apply it. Think about it for a moment. How do you combine a human brain with a heart, lungs, eyes, and all the other organs and parts, and make them work in unison? How do you do that and on top of that do it in such a way that it is autonomous? That means it is in control and it can make its own choices and put those choices into action. Therein lies the miracle of life. It is the soul and the spirit of the man that gives the body life. And who gave us our soul and spirit as well as our bodies? God. And so when we talk about the invisible world, we are talking about the world of **the soul and spirit working through human consciousness in conjunction with the things of God.**

Now certainly we need to be aware of what is going on around us in the physical and visible world. I mean if I am in the middle of the street and a car is coming at me, it would help if I am aware of it – but the only way I am going to be aware of it is if my mind tells me that it is coming, and then I have to decide what I am going to do in response – if I am going to get out of the way. I make that decision in the invisible, spiritual realm. So in the painting, before the

young man could move his king, he had to know that he could move it; and then he had to make the choice to move it.

Life is not just what happens to you. Life is really how you respond to what happens to you. The love of my fellow man and the love of God are choices we make, and all of our actions and all of our responses to what we see in the visible and physical world always originate from the spiritual and invisible world within. **We saw a perfect example of that in Syria over a week ago. The evil of babies being gassed first was devised in the invisible and spiritual realm of a wicked heart.**

And it is the invisible realm of the heart that God is most concerned about. It is why the Bible says in **I Sam. 16:7** that ***"for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*** Who is the only One who can see your heart? God. In fact, when we look at where and when our first parents turned away from the Lord – we find two things – first, where? Where were they? They were in a perfect environment – the garden of Eden. And when were they in the garden? When they had perfect bodies. They had everything. So it wasn't the physical and visible that was a guarantee of anything; again it was the spiritual and invisible. What would they choose to do in the invisible and spiritual realm?

And this now brings us back to Satan, yes, the devil. **Why a Satan?** Some here may even question the existence of a devil, a powerful fallen angel. Do you know why I believe there is a devil. The same reason why I believe there is a Jesus. I can see the evidence. And more importantly, Jesus dealt with Satan and warned us about Satan. He said about him in **Jn. 8:44**, ***"He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies."*** And then later in **Jn. 10:10**, speaking again of the devil, Jesus said, ***"The thief comes to lie, kill, and destroy."*** That is the ultimate contrast, isn't it? Now what do you think would be the most effective means of Satan gaining control of folks – convincing them that he does not exist!

But I know what you are thinking, "If God is such a good God, why would you allow such an evil being to exist?" Some people think God created evil because he created Satan. But God did not create the devil as the devil. Did you know that? He created him first as a beautiful, powerful angel, neither good or bad. When he was created, he was called Lucifer—which in Latin means *"the brilliant one"* or *"the shining one"*. We hear the Lord declare judgment on this angel in **Is. 14:12-15**: ***"How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! 13"But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. 14'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' 15"Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol, to the recesses of the pit."***

Recall Jesus’ words in **Lk. 10:18**, **“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”** We find more about the nature of Lucifer’s rebellion and fall from heaven in **Ezekiel 28**. Though this passage is first directed toward the King of Tyre, it becomes apparent that the passage also refers to no mere mortal. Please turn with me to **Ezekiel 28:1-19**.

We see that the Lord first rebukes the King of Tyre for the root of all sin which is self-exaltation or pride: Ezekiel writes, **“The word of the Lord came again to me, saying,² ‘Son of man, say to the leader of Tyre, ‘Thus says the Lord God, ‘Because your heart is lifted up And you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of gods in the heart of the seas’; Yet you are a man and not God, although you make your heart like the heart of God...”**

But as we read further down, we see that things change – the person to whom God is speaking lived before man was created. **“You had the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 “You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The ruby, the topaz and the diamond; The beryl, the onyx and the jasper; The lapis lazuli, the turquoise and the emerald; And the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets, Was in you. On the day that you were created they were prepared. 14 “You were the anointed cherub who covers,”** Cherubs are the angels who are allowed closest access to God, and Lucifer was anointed as the principal angel among them. He oversaw the sanctuary of God and was in charge of the worship of the Lord.

“And I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked in the midst of the stones of fire. 15 “You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until unrighteousness was found in you. God created Lucifer with no flaws, and he was beautifully adorned. He was a sight to behold—until wickedness and pride began to change him.

16 “By the abundance of your trade you were internally filled with violence, and you sinned; Therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God. And I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. 17 “Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor.”

So how could such a beautiful being created by God have such fatal flaws? His problem arose from his ability to make choices. God gave Lucifer the freedom to love and serve Him by his own will. He gave Lucifer the choice to do so. And He gives us that choice as well. He could have made the angels and human beings as robots – programmed to love and serve. But that is not true love. God wanted willing, authentic worship from His creation. But Lucifer chose not to give it. Whereas he could have made his choices out of love and respect for God, he chose instead to base his decisions upon his own arrogant self-love. **“Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground”** (v. 17). Pride took over Lucifer’s heart, and he began to ask why he needed God if he had all this beauty and glory of his own.

He wanted the glory for himself. But glory belongs only to God! And God says that He will not share His glory with anyone. So Lucifer became known as Satan, which means “the adversary,” and he planned a rebellion. And we learn from **Rev. 12:4** that one-third of the angels bought into his lies and joined in his revolt against God. These are what the Bible calls demons. In response, God cast Satan “to the ground” (**Ezekiel 28:17**). Satan and his host were evicted from heaven and an eternal fire was prepared for them (**Matthew 25:41**)

And then God decided to unfold a plan demonstrating to the entire angelic realm that He was to be revered—**not rebelled against**. So God creates man like the angels in His image, but unlike the angels which are spirit beings, God made us to have bodies of flesh and blood that can procreate. Like the angels God also gave us free will – the ability to choose to love and serve God. Lucifer originally oversaw all of God’s angelic creation. Adam oversaw all of God’s earthly creation. Lucifer had direct access to God until his rebellion. Likewise, Adam walked in the garden with God each day until his own fall.

And rather than seeing his likeness to Adam, Satan wanted to exert his rule over him. He wanted to steal Adam’s allegiance and displace God as his master—creating his own kingdom. And he has succeeded in many ways. Who is called the god of this world? Satan (**2 Cor. 4:4**).

But Satan was and is always far outmatched by God. He is not on an equal playing field with God. God has all wisdom, knowledge, and power, and is present everywhere. Satan is limited in his power and knowledge, restricted in his reach. He is a created being who must ask God the Creator for permission to do anything

So if God is greater than Satan, why does He allow Satan to do as he does? He could defeat Satan easily once and for all—and He will eventually. But we need to remember that God is so great that He can even use Satan’s rebellion to bring greater glory to Himself.

And so God decided that rather than simply eliminating Satan, **He would demonstrate that He is powerful enough to defeat any foe**. God allowed sin to enter the world that we might know His great grace and that we might understand His hatred of sin and rebellion. He wanted to demonstrate that love must be balanced with justice. He loves us deeply, yet He is holy and can’t skip over sin. So in order to express His love, He developed a plan of grace to deal with our sin. He provided salvation for His people through His perfect Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus died on the cross to demonstrate God’s holiness and His love. But Jesus didn’t just die on the cross, He also rose from the dead, thereby validating that He truly is the Son of God and the Lord of life.

In fact, by His death He destroyed death. It is why we are told in **Hebrews 2:14-16**, **“Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. ¹⁶ For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.”**

And it is the resurrection that validates the grace, mercy, truth, love and power of God! But on the Friday Christ was crucified, the devil thought he had won, not simply because Jesus had died, but because mankind had put Christ on the cross. The devil, which literally means "the accuser," could point the finger at God and say, "Aha! There they go again. They really don't love you. They are just in it for themselves. They don't want to follow you! Let me have them! They can serve me! CHECKMATE!"

But we know that it was not the end. God, the Lord of the universe, had one more move - the resurrection of not just the spirit or the soul but of the body as well. The truth is Jesus Christ came the first time to deal first with the invisible and spiritual realm of the soul and spirit. Because before you can have physical transformation, before you can see the good of God in your visible life, there must be spiritual transformation within you, in the invisible realm that you can't see. Before you can truly experience all that God has for you in the physical visible world, you must follow Him in the spiritual and invisible realm. And that involves the choices each of us make. God has given us all we need to move in spiritual victory. We'll talk more about that later in the Easter Season.

None of us were there that day to see the Lord rise from the dead. Only a select few were there that first day. But as the days and weeks went by, hundreds of others saw the Risen Lord. And after Jesus ascended to heaven forty days later, He was seen by thousands and then tens of thousands, and then millions and finally today, billions. We see Him not merely in the physical and visible world, but we recognize Him in the spiritual and invisible realm of life which ultimately is the basis for everything that happens in the physical and visible world. In life, seeing is not believing; it is believing that is seeing. Believing not in fairy tales or wishful thinking, but in the evidence of the Living God who came down in the flesh – fully God, fully man in the Person of Jesus Christ, who now enables us to say to the devil, to death, and to our own sinful nature. Checkmate! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!