

Overcoming the Darkness
Unveiling the Spiritual Realm
August 5-6

Introduction

Hey everyone! My name is Mark and I want to welcome you to our service. Today we are kicking off a brand new series called, *Overcoming the Darkness* where we are learning about the spiritual realm and how it affects our lives.

What you believe about life

How many of you would agree that *what* you believe about life determines *how* you live it? Let's say we had two people.

Person 'A' believes that all life is the result of natural processes, there is no higher power, and nothing happens after we die. Good and evil are subjective concepts which find meaning only within the context of individual choices and responsibilities. Life is inherently neutral and devoid of intrinsic meaning. People must create their own meaning and purpose through a seemingly indifferent universe.

Person 'B' believes that all life was created by an intelligent designer. This higher power is intricately involved in the happenings of our existence. They have also defined good and evil. Our current state of existence is temporary but the way that we live in this state of our existence (our actions, thoughts and choices) will determine the outcome for the rest of our infinite existence.

How many of you suspect that these two people might lead significantly different lives? But you want to know something? I suspect that most people live somewhere in between. Most people don't live with 100% certainty about *what* they believe.

Maybe they *mostly* believe that all life is the result of natural process, that there is no higher power, and that nothing happens after we die. But they're not 100% sure. And they can't seem to shake this nagging question, "But what if there's more?" So they adopt some form of quasi-spirituality just to cover their bases. Nothing *too* crazy but, you know, just in case.

Or maybe they *mostly* believe that this life is not a coincidence. There probably is a higher power. There really is such thing as good and evil — right from wrong. Maybe this current state of existence isn't all there is and there is a life to come. But most days are pretty, well, normal. Not too much evidence of the supernatural. Mostly just natural. So they tend to live life mostly for the here and now with some quasi-form of spirituality just to cover their bases. Nothing *too* crazy but, you know, just in case.

The Spiritual Realm

What do you believe about life? How did we get here? Why are we here? What happens when we die? *What* you believe about life will determine *how* you live it. Both now, and for eternity. So what do you *really* believe about life?

Today I want to share with you what the Bible says about life. Spoiler alert: It might sound a little crazy. How crazy?

Remember when Keanu Reeves played a computer programmer who suspected that there was something wrong with the reality he was experiencing? And then Lawrence Fishburne confirmed that his suspicions were true and that all life as he knew it was really a computer-

simulated illusion called the Matrix meant to distract him from the truth that he was a slave and that his actual body was being held in a pod to provide energy for their robotic overlords? Sort of life that. (Without the robotic overlords part, for now).

In our last series, *Heavenly Wholeness* we learned that we are three parts — spirit, soul, and body and that the condition of our spirit greatly impacts our soul and body. The Bible says that this isn't just true for individuals but for all of reality. In other words, there is a spirit dimension to life that impacts the natural world.

“For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him,” (Colossians 1:16 NIV).

So unlike Person 'A', the Bible states that *all things were created*. Not just in the physical (earth) but also in the spiritual (heaven). Not just in the visible (what we can perceive with our natural senses) but the invisible (spiritual).

1. God created all things
2. Creation has both a spiritual and physical dimension.

What else does the Bible tell us about this unseen dimension?

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal,” (2 Corinthians 4:18 NIV).

Not only is there an unseen spiritual reality but the Bible makes it clear that, like with us, the spiritual dimension is the most significant part of reality and what we should focus on. The seen is temporary but the unseen is eternal.

The Spiritual Battle

If you're tracking, the Bible established that there is a spiritual dimension and that it is the most significant aspect of our existence. Now let's see what state the spiritual realm is in,

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms,” (Ephesians 6:12 NIV).

The Bible is saying that the spiritual dimension is not a neutral place. It is a highly contested war zone and all of humanity is caught in the crossfire. Our greatest struggle is not against China, or North Korea, or Radical Left Extremists, or the Far-Right. And the world's greatest threat is not a woke President or a fascist dictator. I'm not minimizing those things but our true enemy is the devil and his forces of darkness. So how did the devil come to power?

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were given dominion and authority over the earth to rule and subdue it. As I said in an earlier message, people claim that Satan is powerless. He's not powerless, he's actually quite powerful but what he needs is the authority to use that power. As long as Adam and Eve possessed authority, Satan was unable to exercise his power. But Satan deceived Adam and Eve into relinquishing their authority to him through sin.

²⁷ *“...and do not give the devil a foothold,” (Ephesians 4:27 NIV).*

²⁷ *“and give no opportunity to the devil,” (Ephesians 4:27 ESV).*

The word for ‘foothold’ or ‘opportunity’ is the Greek word τόπος (topos). It’s where we get the word ‘topography’. It means ‘place’. When we sin (in this context the sin is anger) we give the devil a place in our lives. We give him authority and jurisdiction to inhabit that place. That’s what Adam and Eve did through sin, they gave the devil place in the world. He now has the authority and jurisdiction to be here. Are there areas of our lives we are giving Satan authority to inhabit? Does he have a foothold in your life?

When Satan tempted Jesus with the kingdoms of the world in the wilderness, Jesus didn’t dispute the authority of that claim because at that time Satan had been given authority over the world. Here is a Biblical description of the world and its inhabitants under Satan’s rule,

“As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath,” (Ephesians 2:1-3).

The devil has kept all of humanity in a perpetual state of sin and separation from God. He has kept people enslaved to their fleshly desires and completely cut off from the Spirit. I imagine Jesus coming home to earth like Marty McFly from Back to the Future 2 after Biff had risen to power and turned Hill Valley into an evil wasteland. Or Simba returning to Pride Rock. The devil took authority over the earth and enslaved people to sin. This was why Jesus came,

⁸ *“The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work,” (1 John 3:8).*

At the start of His earthly ministry Jesus proclaims,

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me,
because He has anointed Me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,” (Luke 4:18).*

Jesus came to undo the works of Satan and to establish God’s Kingdom in opposition to the devil. But how could He do that if the devil had authority and jurisdiction over humanity? We were legally indebted to Satan. The charges of our sin stood in accusation against us.

¹³ *“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross,” (Colossians 2:13-15).*

Where does our victory come from? The cross. Where does our freedom come from? The cross. Where does our healing come from? The cross. It was our sin that gave Satan authority so only One without sin could cancel that debt. Jesus paid our debt of sin on the cross and disarmed the power of Satan over our world.

⁷ “No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory,” (1 Corinthians 2:7-8).

If the devil had understood what God intended to do through Jesus’ death on the cross he never would have crucified the Lord of glory.

Christus Victor

In closing, I want to read a paraphrase from Pastor Mark Driscoll’s book *Death by Love*. In it, he uses creative poetic imagery to illustrate Jesus’ victory on the cross.

To every unbelieving eye, the Great Dragon was the crowned victor, standing over Jesus Christ in the ring of human history, spewing blasphemies, spitting upon His face, placing a crown of thorns upon His head in mockery, and pulling out Jesus’ beard as He lay beaten and stripped naked on the dust of His own earth. Placing a knee on one limb at a time, the Great Dragon held in his hands a large hammer and spikes to nail Jesus’s body to a Roman cross. With his army of demons and human servants cheering their king in his conquest, the great dragon laughed loudly while nailing a mocking banner above Jesus’ head that read, “King of the Jews.” The Great Dragon raised up the broken, beaten, and bloodied crucified Jesus for all to see so that Jesus would be shamed by the people and spirits He had made who gathered to cover Him with spit, curses, and jeering.

Jesus breathed His last as the dragon raised his head in pride to declare his ultimate victory as new king and Lord. Meanwhile, Jesus’ body was laid in the tomb, and His followers left in utter silence, leaving a path muddied with tears behind them.

But...

Three days later, Jesus your warrior king rose in victory over death. Seeing Jesus alive, the Great Dragon snatched you as his captive, drew his sword of law covered with the blood of your sin, and thrust its razor sharp point at your head, naming every sin you have committed.

Smiling, Jesus stepped forward and declared that He already paid the penalty for your sins on the cross, canceled any right Satan had to hold you captive, and defeated your enemy along with his servants, and their works and affects in your life. With fear in his eyes, the Great Dragon dropped his sword from your head, and was overcome with dread as he understood the victory Jesus had won for you through His seeming defeat. Drawing His own sword of truth, Jesus landed a crushing blow on the head of the Great Dragon, shattering his crown and bloodying his head. Jesus dropped the Great Dragon into the very dust, in which Jesus Himself had lain three days prior.

Ashamed of your many years at the dragon’s side, you stood off to the side, alone, gazing at the ground until Jesus came to you. Taking your chin in His hand, Jesus lifted your face, looked you in the eye, and told you that your sins were forgiven, your enemy conquered, and your life

liberated from captivity, and that God was now your father, new life your gift, and heaven your home. As tears streamed down your face, Jesus asked you always to remember to see yourself as He does, not in light of what you have done or what has been done to you, but rather solely by what He has done for you as your victorious Warrior King. At that moment, you feel freedom for the first time. At that moment, what Jesus has done for you was made known to you by God, the Holy Spirit. At that moment, you stepped over the fallen dragon, and embraced Jesus with a passionate joy you had previously never known. You were finally known. You were finally loved. You were finally safe. You were finally free.

Conclusion

On the cross Jesus dealt a critical blow to the devil and his kingdom of darkness. He canceled the debt of sin and its penalty of death for any and all who place their faith in Him. Jesus also established His Kingdom on the earth for all who live according to His ways. One day His Kingdom will reign over all of creation and for all of eternity.

Now we live in the now and not yet. God's Kingdom is now and also still to come. Salvation is now and also still to come. Our freedom from sin is now and still to come. Although Satan's kingdom has been dealt a critical blow he still maintains authority over those who give it to him. Until Jesus' return, His people are called to continue His ministry of destroying the works of the devil, proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind and to set the oppressed free. I pray that you will continue to journey with us as we learn how to walk in His light and overcome the darkness.