



Evil unmasked - Job 41

Melvin Tinker

This is the seventh in a series of sermons by Rev Melvin Tinker based on the book of Job. It would be helpful to read Job chapter 41 before listening to, or reading, the sermon.

To go to the next part of the series, click [here](#).

When I was little, one of the highlights of Saturday teatime telly was, 'The Legend of the Lone Ranger.' The Lone Ranger was a masked Zorro-like figure who would ride in to town with his trusty Indian side kick - Tonto, and put wrongs to right by roughing up a few outlaws. Invariably in the last scene he would leave his calling card - a silver bullet and some old timer staring at this would say to his friend, 'Who was that masked man?' 'Why,' came the reply, 'that was the Lone Ranger' and off the intrepid duo would ride into the sunset to the theme from the William Tell overture with the hearty cry of a 'Hi Ho Silver - Away.' And you know, that is the question I want to ask of Satan when reading the book of Job. You see, in the first two chapters we are introduced to the enemy of God's people - the Accuser which is what the word Satan means. And he is so full of himself isn't he? He is enamoured with his own self-importance, his taunting of God, and his denigration of God's people. Then suddenly he disappears from view - 'Who was that masked man?' we ask. But *does* he disappear entirely never to be seen again? I want to suggest to you that in fact he does not. His handiwork is seen throughout the book until eventually in chapter 41 God strips off the mask to reveal the work of a monster - known here as the Leviathan.

So I want us to explore a little more fully this unmasking of evil by looking at this strange

creature Leviathan.

First, **the identity of the Leviathan**. Having just read through this passage what creature would you say we are dealing with here? This is what one commentator writes: 'The leviathan has been thought to be a dolphin, a tunny fish or a whale, but the general view is that it is a crocodile.' Well, I doubt that even Steve Irwin himself has ever come across a crocodile like this! Why devote 34 verses to showing that God is more powerful than a suitcase with legs? To put it mildly isn't that to state the blindingly obvious? Why should Job be impressed by that statistic? What is more, the description we are given of this beast far exceeds any living creature known to man. This is a *monster* of mythic proportions. So what or who is it?

Well, this is where following the principle of 'using Scripture to interpret Scripture' comes to our aid. We need to ask: where else does the Leviathan appear in the Bible?

In the first place it surfaces at different points in the story of Job itself. The first appearance occurs in chapter 3 which follows on from Satan's disappearance in chapter 2. Job says (Job 3:3-8):
<blockquote style="margin-right: 0px;" dir="ltr">
"May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' ... May those who curse days curse that day, those who are ready to rouse Leviathan. Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?"

Here the monster is linked with death. This is some grim reaper figure we are talking about. Another name given to this sea monster is 'Rahab' and in chapter 9:13 we see that the figure does not stand alone but as a whole army at its disposal, 'God does not restrain his anger; even the cohorts of Rahab cowered at his feet.' In chapter 26:11-13 this is a monster God does battle with and subdues,

<blockquote style="margin-right: 0px;" dir="ltr">
The pillars of the heavens quake, aghast at his rebuke. By his power he churned up the sea; by his wisdom he cut Rahab to pieces. By his breath the skies became fair; his hand pierced the gliding serpent.

The word translated 'gliding serpent' in verse 13 - 'nahash' is exactly the same word used to describe the serpent in the Garden of Eden. So here we have a being which brings about death, which has an army of helpers and can take the form of a wily serpent. To use a phrase of Rolf Harris: 'Can you see who it is yet?'

But Rahab the sea monster is also there in Psalm 74:13-14:

*<blockquote style="margin-right: 0px;" dir="ltr">
But you, O God, are my king from of old; you bring salvation upon the earth. It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke the heads of the monster in the waters. It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan and gave him as food to the creatures of the desert.*

So this is a chaos monster, arrogant and proud, inhabiting the depths of the sea - the sea in Scripture being a symbol for all that is dark and rebellious standing in opposition to God. That is the domain in which this creature exercises his rule.

In Isaiah 27:1 the same symbol is used to depict evil rulers who threaten God's people with captivity, as did Pharaoh of old and here God promises to deliver his people from such a monstrous tyrant: *'In that day, the LORD will punish with his sword, his fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent; he will slay the monster of the sea.'* So let us ask: who stands implacably opposed to God's rule, bringing death, chaos and destruction in his wake? Who is the enemy of God's people looking for someone to devour and destroy? By now you should have got the answer.

But just in case you haven't, let's take a look at the features of the Leviathan in chapter 41:18-21:

*<blockquote style="margin-right: 0px;" dir="ltr">
His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth.*

Where do you think the idea of a fire breathing

dragon came from? Here. In fact, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, actually uses the word 'dragon' instead of 'Leviathan' at this point, so giving it supernatural connotations. And where else do we find reference to a dragon but in the New Testament where *all* the images finally come together and the full identity of this supernatural creature is revealed - Revelation 12:9 *'The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.'*

So now we can see what God is doing here with Job as he embarks upon a graphic description of this wicked creature which is loose in the world. He is in effect saying to Job, 'Yes, your instincts were right back in chapter 9:24 when looking around at the chaos in society and in your own life you asked, "If it is not he (God), then *who* is it?" Whilst there is only one God and no second god, nonetheless there is another 'who' - a supernatural being working his wicked way - his name is Satan. This is the monster who effectively appears again and again in your life Job. The one behind the bandits which attacked your farm, the death inflicted on your family, the disease crippling your body and yes even, in the guise of your so called friends who kicked you when you were down, who told you nothing other than lies and half truths, for he has been a liar from the very beginning.' So you see, Satan is being unmasked. Not in a straightforward way, but by using evocative imagery which Job could understand.

Now it is so important for us that we grasp this. To deny a personal devil is not only to go against the weight of the evidence of the biblical revelation but it leaves us with the only option that evil is just a by-product of impersonal forces which God could not help and over which he has little control. It also means that no one is responsible for evil in terms of evil being *intentional* on the part of someone. God is held responsible in that he decided to make a world which had some unfortunate by-products which he couldn't foresee or he couldn't ultimately control, in which case *he* has acted irresponsibly. If this is so then God is reduced to being little more than a mad super-scientist whose experiment got out of hand, a little like Frankenstein. *But* if there is a personal being who is immediately responsible for so much of the wickedness we see going on in the world and to

which men and women surrender themselves, albeit unwittingly when they choose to sin, then that begins to make *some* sort of sense. Of course it pushes the question one stage back: where did this creature come from in the first place? God could not have *made* a creature evil otherwise he would be the author of evil. But what if he had made a good creature which *turns* evil, such that evil is *self-generating*?

Well, let's think about **the activity of the Leviathan** to see if we can move towards an answer to that question.

Here Job is being presented with a frightening, unruly creature which is way beyond the control of man but *not* beyond the power and purposes of God. You see that in Job 41:1-11. This creature's most striking features come out in verses 18-21:

<blockquote style="margin-right: 0px;" dir="ltr">
His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds. His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth.

What does that remind you of? Is it not what we have seen of God in chapters 9 and 38? There we saw the power and splendour of God being revealed through what he has made - the lights in the heavens and the quaking of the earth in what is called a Theophany. Here we have this evil creature mimicking all of that. Now this actually takes us to the heart of the nature of evil and the nature of sin and how such a creature like Satan came into being in the first place. Let me explain.

God did not 'make' evil, because evil does not have the kind of substantial existence that good has. Evil is more of an 'unmaking' in that it can't exist by itself; it is a corruption or perversion of something good. So evil desires parody good desires. Thieves want to possess things which are good in themselves like beautiful possessions. Gluttons desire food good in itself - like strawberries and steaks. Even tyrants might want good things for their country - harmony and prosperity. But what makes them evil is that wrong motives drive them and wrong means are employed to procure them. When things don't occupy their rightful place they then *become* evil.

Evil then is a parody or a 'mock up' of what is good. So the worst kind of hostility turns out to be fake friendliness, the worst kind of cruelty fake kindness. So if evil is a good thing misappropriated, an 'unmaking' of the good, then we are given some idea of how evil may have come about in the first place. Suppose a good personal being *chooses* to try and occupy a position he shouldn't in God's universe? Choosing is a good thing, but *what* is chosen - a position to which one is not suited - can make it a bad thing. When that happens this choosing has a corrupting influence on the whole character of the chooser, so that the being itself becomes bad. You can't ask the question what *made* the being choose the bad in the first place, because by definition choice is just choice. To be 'made' to choose something is a contradiction in terms. The person simply *makes* a choice. Sure, all sorts of factors are taken into account when deciding what to do, but at the end of the day all you can say is that a person *chose*. And that would appear to be the case in what little the Bible tells us about the origin of Satan. Turn with me to Isaiah 14:12-15:

<blockquote style="margin-right: 0px;" dir="ltr">
How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

What is that all about? Well, the surrounding nations of Israel had a myth in which the 'Bright shiner', Heylel, the name given to the planet Venus, also called 'son of the dawn' because it rises shortly before the sun, tried to become King by scaling the mountain ramparts of the heavenly city, only to be vanquished by the all conquering sun. That picture is taken, reapplied and given a new twist by Isaiah, for *now* it applies to the King of Babylon and his arrogance to be the all conquering King. This king is inordinately proud, having aspirations to world domination. In short he wants to be god. But in Job 41:34 we read of the Leviathan that *'He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud.'* So

could it be that behind this picture in Isaiah of a human being we have reflected another picture of an earlier *angelic* being who *also* aspires to be like god and has been encouraging human beings to do the same ever since? The Hebrew word, 'Heylel', 'bright shiner' or 'Venus', is translated in the Latin as - Lucifer. And you can't help but notice the arrogance in the words 'I will... I will... I will...'

Satan sought to be like God - the very offer with which he tempted Eve 'You will be like God' (Genesis 3:5). And so Satan works most effectively by mimicking God. God promotes his will by words - giving commands and making promises - so does Satan. God overawes people with spectacular signs and miracles- so does Satan. But they are all inferior to God, they don't quite match up to him (verse 20). God's Word is truth and brings liberation in its wake; Satan's words are lies and half truths which bring people into slavery. Let me give an example. Since World War 2 the average American and Western European is wealthier and healthier than all but a handful of people who had ever lived before. Yet, this same period saw an even greater growth of clinical depression. This has been carefully documented by Gregg Easterbrook in his book *The Progress Paradox: How life gets better while people feel worse*. There are several reasons offered why this is so which go beyond simply having better diagnosis. First, with an emphasis on individualism people see *all* of life through self. Whereas previous generations placed emphasis on family, faith and community, now, because of the emphasis on self, our setbacks take on a far greater importance. There is no larger context in which to place them. Secondly, people are seeing themselves more and more as victims with a corresponding feeling of helplessness. Victims are people to whom things happen not people who make things happen. But Easterbrook notes that the main factor is that 'many people have lost their belief in higher powers or a higher purpose.' In other words, there is no God or ultimate purpose to life. That is the lie that has been promoted by the intelligentsia and in some cases by clergymen - the result - depression. Who do you think is behind that lie? We have him laid bare here in Job 41 - he is the great dragon - Satan.

So what is **the purpose of the Leviathan**? That is, what is *God* doing with him? You see, the main point of this chapter is not simply the revelation

that there is a malevolent super spiritual being at work in the world, but that this being does not lie outside God's *ultimate* rule. This comes out in the first eleven verses and the claim in verse 11 that '*Everything* under heaven is mine'. Yes there is a devil, but as Martin Luther would often remark: 'He is *God's* devil', that is, he does not have total reign. **God** will even use *him* to bring about his righteous purposes in the world. As we saw a few weeks ago in chapter 1, Satan was given *permission* to test Job, but limits were set by God - Job himself was not to be harmed. Of course Satan would love us to believe the lie that he has unlimited power, for his power depends upon us believing the lie. But when we see that he is more like a snarling dog we have to pass by on our way to heaven, but who is chained, well then we begin to see things quite differently don't we?

So how is Satan used by God? In three ways.

First, to *refine the faithful*. The devil's disease is in all of us - even Job - that is to claim we know more than we do - in short, pride. How is pride to be countered? By being humbled. The apostle Paul knew this in his own experience. So in 2 Corinthians 12: 7 he says: *To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me*. Who was the messenger? Was it a pain or a person? We don't know. What we do know is that although it was an activity of Satan, it was given by God which, with the right response, does God's work *Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."* Now, do you believe that?

Secondly, Satan is used to *awaken the sleeping*. It is only too possible for Christians to drift off into a moral stupor, a spiritual twilight zone, so they find themselves thinking and doing things they should not. As Elihu pointed out in chapter 33:6, Job was in danger of such a state when questioning God's goodness: *'Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to affliction.'* And so God sometimes hands over people to have a bit more of a taste of the devil in the hope that they will discover it to be so foul that they repent and get sorted. It happened in Corinth. There was an adulterer in the church and so Paul says. *'Hand*

this man over to Satan. So his sinful self will be destroyed and his spirit will be saved for the day of the LORD.' (1 Corinthians 5:5). Drastic situations require drastic remedies, so God will actually allow a person experience hell on earth in the hope of awaking his desire for heaven if needs be. And maybe that is where you are at the moment. You find yourself in the terrible grip of a sin which you know to be wrong but of which you refuse to let go. Well, be prepared for things to get worse because God loves you so much he will put you through the mill so he can save you.

But thirdly, God uses Satan to *teach the church*. When you think about it that is one of the reasons we have this book. We would not be learning all that we are about a Christian approach to suffering had Job *not* gone through this appalling vale of tears. Not only that but as we see the triumph of God in the life of this man, does it not strengthen us that God will do the same in our life? What is more I know of people here in this congregation who have and are undergoing trails I could not even begin to imagine coping with. And as I see their faith and courage, their hope in a good God, well, that helps me immensely to put my troubles in perspective. God is using them to teach me and I am grateful and I hope you are too.

So now in chapter 41 Satan has been unmasked before Job. God is good after all; it is Satan who is evil. God is powerful after all, Satan is but a creature used by God to bring about his sovereign purposes. And so Satan is left looking like the creature he really is. What is that? Well, take the first letter of the ways God uses the devil and see if you can discover Satan's real identity: **R**efine the faithful; **A**waken the sleeping; **T**each the church. Can you see who it is yet? Satan is a R.A.T.

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