

## Seizing the Future

Lesson 20: Wednesday, May 3, 2006

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In the perspective of this course we are dealing with the unfolding of a single story. It is not the story of the universe all the way from the big bang until today, a ho-hum account of one thing after another. Although presented speculatively, it is more especially the story of a good Creator and a good creation which after a lengthy period is suddenly attacked by a breakaway leader who, with his intelligent followers, wound terribly both the creation and the reputation of the Creator, thus presenting the challenge of redemption and restoration.

Act 1 is the longest of all the Acts, by far. During this first act the universe is created and the very lengthy period of the development of life takes place, possibly the work of angels guided by God, pleasing Him as they gradually learn what today we are beginning to understand as the true complexities of life itself.

The emergency arises at the end of Act 1. By this time atoms and molecules and, most surprisingly of all, the incredible intricacies of life have been developed, not just tiny bacteria based on DNA molecules, but small animals. Some of the animals are radially symmetrical, like star fish. Others are "bipolar" which means they have a front and a back, a right and a left. The key point is that none of these animals is aggressive. None needs to defend itself.

But the emergency, introducing Act 2, arises when the archangel whom Paul calls "the god of this world," with all his host, turns against God. This is the Fall of Satan. As a result, during this much shorter but still lengthy Act 2,

predatory forms of life appear at all levels, from bacteria to dinosaurs, and all of nature becomes a battle ground.

Meanwhile during this tumultuous Act 2 the good angels continue to develop increasingly intelligent forms of life. By 11,000 years ago truly modern humans finally appear, but like the rest of nature, are dangerously predatory.

Finally, a major counter move introduces Act 3. A massive asteroid wipes out all life in the middle East, possibly gouging the below-sea-level depression now known as the Dead Sea. And now in this region, the original, non-carnivorous kind of plants and animals are recreated in the Garden of Eden and a new Adamic race is brought into existence in the image of God, with the apparent intent of re-introducing harmonious, not carnivorous forms of life, life that is a reflection of the end of time when the lion will lie down with the lamb (Isa. 11).

However, Act 4 begins when Adam falls, and Eden breaks down. Now, the new forms of non-predatory life of Genesis chapter one interbreed with the earlier depraved forms of life outside of the region of the Garden of Eden. The Sons of God marry the daughters of men, and the length of human life gradually sags to a fraction of what it was intended.

Obviously, as the result of Adam's fall the image of God was damaged or erased, whatever it was, and all human beings are now equally depraved and in need of redemption.

We, today, stand at the later stages of

this Act 4, in which God's redemptive work is making men new and enlisting them in the war effort to "destroy the works of the Devil."

Meanwhile, in this present Act 4 situation, widespread delusion and blindness prevails even concerning the existence of a war against Satan. This is especially true and tragic in those parts of the world where redemption would seem to have succeeded more completely, that is, in the "Christian" West, and where war efforts could best be launched.

Much of the world is still so beaten down by the ravages of evil - poverty, disease, human conflict - that it is ironic that the poor and the powerless of this world are more likely to understand the wartime footing we actually are experiencing. It is further ironic because they may be the least likely to be able to do anything about it. For them "escapist theology" is the best solace. They are the ones who now can best sing "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through."

Since the poor and the disadvantaged can't be effectively involved in a global war to defeat the works of Satan we must return to those whom we might describe as "disinclined," but theoretically capable.

The famous philosopher of yesterday, Mortimer Adler, made the observation that what the world needed was the "moral equivalent of war." That is, an attitude of all-out war effort not fighting against flesh and blood, but a similarly massive, urgent, intense, sacrificial concentration of human beings against not humans but human problems. I would add, against an enemy that is not human and whose very exist-

ence is denied apathetically by even most Christians today.

Wars in the past have typically gotten started because of some massive and aggressive challenge, like the sinking of the Lusitania (WWI), or the bombing of Pearl Harbor (WWII). The closest thing to that might be a global plague of the sort that killed from 50 to 100 million people in 1918 - far more people right after World War I than were killed in the war itself. But even that might not lead to the kind of total war which the United States and other nations experienced in what we call the Second World War. Not many people alive today lived through that war; those of us who did, can recall vividly the utter transformation of a nation involved in all-out, total war.

I have mentioned already in earlier lessons what happens when a society is totally caught up in war and whether we think of "servicemen and women" or civilians, we are thinking in terms of people, all of whom have most every waking moment been controlled and guided by the dictates of the conflict.

If our analysis in these lessons is correct, this war has been going on ever since Satan fell, and was renewed with humans involved when Adam fell. Adam's role in the garden was to take care of it, but after Eden broke down, his own survival was at stake. Indeed, his own son lost his life no doubt in part due to the sin permeated atmosphere outside of Eden.

There is no likelihood that the equivalent of a Pearl Harbor is going to happen that would rally the social resources of the world, or even Christian resources, or more particularly, the Evangelicals. But it is easily possible to

imagine that the force of the Lord's Prayer "thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," would require us to do everything we possibly can, not just to exhibit fantastic personal sacrifice, but to mobilize as much of the Christian world and the non-Christian world as possible.

To quote 1 John 3:8 again, "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the Devil." This verse points out how very central war against evil, war against Satan, actually is. If this is the central purpose, or one of the central purposes of the Son of God, who made it plain that, "as my Father has sent me, even so send I you," then His commission is our commission and our commission is today widely underestimated and misunderstood. First century believers could not know how great the enemy was, for example, in the realm of disease.

We do have, vaguely, the structure of war in our hands. Christians, notably in the western world, and now noticeably in the rest of the world, have launched mission agencies which are teams of people explicitly determined to carry out purposeful actions in accord with God's will. These could be the "armed forces" of the Kingdom, containing the "servicemen" of that kingdom. In that kingdom there are also "civilians," the donors, the supporters, and even those who do not support them, who are "behind the lines." The problem is, that the civilians are not remotely as mobilized at this time as they would be during a real total war, and it is true that even the servicemen are only striking a glancing blow against the enemy of the Kingdom.

On the first page of an article in *Christianity Today* (May 2006) entitled, "The Debt Slayers" the author speaks of the profusion of financial managers that now exist in an age of utterly unprecedented Evangelical wealth. It says,

Remarkably, American consumers are simultaneously earning record income while accumulating record debt. And there is little difference between the amounts that Christians and non-Christians earn, spend, save, charge, or donate to charities.

I don't believe the problem is that we have outrageously selfish, evil, or even acquisitive people. We simply have people who don't sense any war effort and are living it up in an apparently peacetime situation.

It might be observed in passing that if all mission donors were to adopt the consumption level of the missionary families they support this would free up, in a large percentage of the donors cases, a good percentage of their income. But right now they would say, "What's the use?" Such a question derives understandably from the thought that the needs around the world are dimly existent, hopelessly too large to resolve, or the efforts being made seem to be ineffective or futile.

If we are going to seize the future in terms of the wartime situation in which we find ourselves, several radically new perspectives must urgently become more widespread.

### **The Scope of the Problem**

First of all, we must realize the true scope of the problem. If Satan is able to dull people's senses and to divert their gaze, that would certainly explain the extent to which, as John Eldredge puts it in his book *The Epic*, "I am staggered by the level of naivete that most people

live with regarding evil." How is it possible for us to get a good deal of our country into a war effort in Iraq, where perhaps ten Americans die a day, and not be far more alarmed over the fact that back home due to two diseases alone, we lose as many people as if we are fighting 600 Iraq wars? Cardiovascular disease and cancer claw to horrible death 6,000 people per day - 600 times as many as in Iraq - who go down in as great a degree of suffering as those who are dying in Iraq. Yet the actual mobilization in this country to understand the origins of either of these two diseases is terrifyingly minor. Well over ninety percent of the money that goes for the ravages of these two diseases (almost two billion dollars a day) is focused on treatments of people who are already diseased, not on pursuing the sources of the diseases.

If this imbalance were more widely known, would this be a functional "Pearl Harbor," to help us rally the troops for a new world war against disease? Our gargantuan outlay in this country for medical and pharmaceutical services is almost totally concentrated on healing activity, not on the eradication of the sources of disease.

### **The Obscurity of the Problem**

Secondly, we need to realize that this problem is not only huge and vicious, it is cloaked in the obscurity of confusion and ignorance. What has just been said about the lack of awareness of the problem is itself clearly a separate aspect to it. The hugeness of the problem wouldn't be as serious if it were in plain sight.

However, thus far I have only spoken of the evil of the massive onslaught of

disease on animals and humans. Evil also includes the widespread corruption of the human element that might be involved in the solution of the problem!

Then, what about the rarely noticed distortions we see in the very existence of predatory forms of life? Take the flagrantly vicious Australian Dingo, which can tear open the throats of thirty sheep without swallowing a drop of blood.

Thus, how about the genetic transformation that could restore predatory life to non-carnivorous condition? Is that part of the mission to glorify God?

If man-eating tigers are vicious due to genetic distortion by Satan and his angels. Isn't that a work of the Devil? How about one day restoring them through genetic re-engineering? Is the only answer to kill or cage? Would it not be glorifying to God not to be blamed for their current predatory state? Again, is that part of our mission? If so, it involved a knowledge of microbiology which has only recently dawned on us.

But there are still other easily overlooked evils.

After many years working for the World Bank, one of the senior officials wrote a book entitled, *The White Man's Burden*. The book points out the gruesome reality that well over half the funds intended to relieve the poverty and economic distress in underdeveloped nations of the world gets diverted by the perfidy of government officials and intermediaries in the needy nations, as well as within the ranks of the 10,000 employees of the World Bank itself. Again and again, the World Bank

has attempted to clean up its act, but the diversion of funds is so extensive that there is little will to do it.

Indeed, for the Kingdom of God to come on earth and His will to be elaborated in opposition to our great enemy, radically new awareness is necessary.

### Who Will Fight for Us?

Furthermore, it would be simplest to believe that it would be sufficient if the Christians of the world are aroused to this effort. Embarrassingly, except in the area of personal salvation and hopes of eternity, most of the efforts and initiatives in our world today that focus on the defeat of the works of the Devil are led by non-Christians, or by entities that are not clearly Christian.

If money would do it, then the magnificent efforts of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation could be the answer, since their example has already forced many other foundations to deal with some of the world's most urgent problems. It so happens that at the cutting edge of microbiological research on sources of disease, Orthodox Jewish doctors are to be found all out of proportion to their percentage of the population. However, even in the case of Jimmy Carter and his outstanding Carter Center, which has a focus on the extermination of disease pathogens, neither the money nor the activity is noticeably connected to the formal Christian movement.

In other words, it does not seem likely that it would be wise to suppose that Christians alone can slay the giant of evil in our world today. In a sense, however, our main purpose, which is more likely achievable, is to clarify the fact that God's purposes, as reflected by

Christian initiatives, make Him out to be the *opponent* of evil, not the *initiator* of evil.

### A Particular Problem

Several types of theology would seem to frustrate any substantial efforts against evil. One theological tradition might emphasize that the world is getting worse and worse anyway, so why bother? Focus on the next world.

Another, more virulent form of theology, would actually attribute all tragedies to the initiative of God Himself, rather than to the initiative of fallen angels, or fallen humanity. This latter type of theology is so pervasive that even Christian leaders can write books like, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, or *Where is God When It Hurts?* In both cases, God's mysterious will, to which we must resign ourselves, is the main emphasis, not an intelligent evil power against which we have a mandate to defeat, or at least die in the attempt.

Even more pervasive is the assumption that Christianity is primarily the rescue of human beings rather than the restoration of all creation. It is thought to escape this world is more important than to restore God's glory through the conquest of the destructive and distorting elements of Satanic fury against God.

### Discipline

The one obvious truth about effective human action is that the vast majority of the work of the world is accomplished through social discipline. There are people with massive amounts of personal discipline. But most people yearn for and require social discipline, even the intrepid professional writers are usually paid royalties in advance so

that the publishers can legitimately ride herd on them and goad them along demanding that they meet deadlines.

In a war, the armed forces are characterized by disciplined troop activities. Commercial enterprises typically squeeze the life out of people to get their work done. Once people retire, their good intentions quickly evaporate in the absence of a lack of social discipline. Their lives are cluttered with many good things, but strikingly different is their output by comparison to their own earlier days when they were in the harness of the work force.

There is a cartoon in the newspapers called Dennis the Menace. One of the cartoons portrayed Dennis in the midst of his own bedroom in great disarray, saying to his mother, "When is Daddy coming home and make me behave?" Even wealthy athletes and movie stars have to pay "trainers." If the world were to depend on personal will power alone, practically everything significant would grind to a halt.

It is well known that the contemporary church in America requires very little of its people. This gives rise to the fact that we have an Opus Dei in the Catholic tradition which harnesses lay believers in a very accountable lifestyle. In the Protestant tradition we have the Disciplined Order of Christ which tends in the same direction, though far less seriously. When everyone does that which is right in their own eyes, the resulting efforts for the Kingdom are token at best, and essentially meaningless at worst. In the case of the Opus Dei, the "sanctification of daily life" is a marvelous emphasis, but considerably directionless without any clear war effort in mind. In the case of the Disci-

plined Order of Christ (DOC), there is even less emphasis upon "holy worldliness," to use Richard Mouw's famous phrase. However, something vaguely equivalent, in addition to, but not in opposition to existing congregations would seem to be necessary if we are going to mobilize Christian believers in any real depth.

At the present time, I am unaware of any substantial, explicitly Christian organization in the world that is focused on the defeat of disease pathogens as is the case with the Carter Center. We have organizations devoted to justice and which defend the rights of Christian believers in public schools and in public life, but these are, to some extent, defensive, or superficial.

There is not space or time here, to go further in elaboration of what it would take to disassociate God from evil events, or the disciplined group efforts necessary for that purpose. But at least we can sense, with what has been said, the larger dimensions of the Christian mission, and the contrast with what is now being accomplished.

Total war will require thousands of Evangelicals to move to the cutting edge of microbiology and of political life, to work for the the transformation of ethical standards throughout the commercial world and a new sense of the need of group discipline to do those things. All this and more is necessary if we are to "seize the future."