

“There was a war in heaven”

I. The Combatants

II. The Timing

III. The Impact

*(Revelation 12:7-12) And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. {8} But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. {9} The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. {10} Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. {11} They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. {12} Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."*

Tell me, have you ever thought about how your life today has been impacted by wars that were fought hundreds or even thousands of years ago? Do you realize how different your life would be if just one or two military battles somewhere in history had gone a different way? For example, if in 732 A.D. the Moorish Army had not been turned away in the Battle of Tours, historians tell us that the dominant religion in Europe would not have been Christianity. It would have been Islam. Makes you wonder whether there would have ever been a Lutheran Reformation. If in 1863 the Battle of Gettysburg had gone the other way, if the Confederate Army had prevailed over the Union forces, one would have to wonder whether America would still be called the land of the free? Or would slavery be the law of the land? Or you think about the invasion of Normandy in 1944. If that major turning point in World War II had gone the other way, if Hitler's Army would have been triumphant, would we all be speaking German (sprechen sie Deutsch?) today?

Sometimes, just one battle, one critical turning point in a military conflict, can have a tremendous impact on the lives of people down through the centuries. Even if they don't realize where or when that battle occurred—even if they are completely oblivious to it, it can still have an impact on how they think or feel.

Well, if that's true regarding battles that were fought in places like Tours and Normandy and Gettysburg, it's even more true regarding a battle that was once fought in heaven. Today on this Festival of Saint Michael and All Angels, we're going to take a closer look at a battle that serves as a critical turning point in history, a battle that a lot of people have been largely oblivious to. But a battle that has an ongoing impact on our lives to this very day. Today we turn our attention to Revelation, chapter 12, where St. John introduces the battle with the simple words,

“There was a War in Heaven”

We'll focus on:

I. The Combatants in that War

II. The Timing of that War

II. The Impact of that War

Every military conflict has forces lined up against each other. The same thing is true for this war in heaven. St John describes the chief antagonists when he writes, *There was a war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.* There you have it. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. That's easy enough. But wait a minute. Who is Michael? And exactly what kind of dragon did he fight? In order to answer these questions, we need to let Scripture interpret Scripture. In Daniel chapter 10, Michael is referred to as "*one of the chief princes.*" Jude 9 is a little more specific. There Michael is called "*the Archangel.*" In all of Scripture, there are only two angels that are named. Michael is one. And Gabriel is the other. In this case, it's Michael who leads his angels in battle against the dragon and his angels. And exactly who, or what, is the dragon? Well, St John explains when he goes on to tell us how this war in heaven ended. He says, *Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. {8} But he (namely, the dragon) was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. {9} The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.* So, according to St. John, the dragon is actually Satan, or as he's called here in our text, "*that ancient serpent,*" an obvious reference to the fact that the Devil once used the form of a serpent to tempt Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

So that's the who of this battle. What about the when? Exactly when did this battle between the good angels and the bad angels take place? When did the devil lose his place in heaven? The first thought that might come to mind would be at the beginning of time, when Satan, who was once a good angel, rebelled against God and was driven out of heaven and thrown into hell. The Apostle Peter describes that event with these words, *God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment.* (2 Peter 2:4)

The question is, is that event which St. Peter describes, the same one that St. John is describing here in our text? Chances are, it's not. Why do I say that? Again, we need to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Notice what Saint John goes on to say. After this war in heaven, (actually, a better translation might be, after that war "in the sky") after Satan hurled to the earth, then what does St John hear a voice in heaven say? "*Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God. For the accuser of our brothers who accuses them before our God night and day has been hurled down.*"

Again, the question is, at what point in history did all those things happen? When did the salvation promised by God come to fruition? When did God fully show his power over the evil one? When did God finally crush the Serpent's head? Or maybe more specifically, when did God take away Satan's ability to accuse you of being guilty before God. When could Satan no longer stand in God's courtroom and point to you and me and say, "They're guilty of sins against God! They belong with me in hell!" When did Satan lose the right to make that accusation? He lost it when God the Father accepted Jesus' life and death that payment for all our sins. When Jesus said on the cross of Calvary, "It is finished," God in effect, said the same thing to Satan. "Satan, now you're finished. You've got nothing on my people anymore. You can't hold anything over their heads. I've forgiven all their sins. So, you Satan, are out of luck. So get out of my face!"

My friends, that was the moment when Satan lost the war. That's when, as John puts it, *The great dragon was hurled down--that ancient serpent called the devil*. In fact, if you think about it, don't you think that's what Jesus was talking about in our Gospel lesson today? After the apostles came back gushing over the fact that they had received power to cast out demons, what did Jesus say? *"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven"* (Luke 10:18). What the disciples were experiencing was just a taste of what Jesus was going to do to Satan on Calvary. Or you think about what Jesus said to his disciples in the days immediately before his death, *"Now is the time for judgment in the world; now the prince of this world will be driven out"* (John 12:31). In the original language, that word, "driven out", is the same word that John uses here in our text, translated as "hurled down". Both are referring to the same event, when Jesus Christ, by his perfect life, his innocent death and his glorious resurrection, triumphed over Satan once and for all!

And really, because Jesus triumphed over Satan on our behalf, that means we get the benefit of his victory. In fact, that's true for every believer in Christ. That's what St. John means when he says, *They* (namely, believers) *overcame him* (namely, the Devil), *by the blood of the Lamb*. Think about that a minute. Satan has been overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Isn't that just further evidence that this war in the sky, this battle that included Michael and all his angels vs. Satan and all his angels, this war that ultimately rendered Satan powerless over God's people—doesn't that imply that this battle took place not at the time when God created the world, but rather, at the time when he redeemed the world? You and I were set free from the grip of Satan not by the power of God, but rather by the blood of God, spilled in love on the cross of Calvary. How did St. John put it in his first epistle? *The blood of Jesus, God's son, purifies us from every sin* (1 John 1:7).

My friends, there's the reason that Satan has lost the war. That's why he can't take you to hell with him. The blood of Jesus as purified you from every sin. Satan's got nothing on you. He can't charge you with a single sin against God, because in Christ, every one of your sins is washed away. You might say that that's the number one way in which this war, waged so long ago, still impacts your life today. It puts your heart at peace knowing that you are all right with God, because of what Jesus has done for you.

But now, I have to tell you, that in addition to that really positive impact that the war in heaven has had on your life, there is also kind of negative impact. St. John talks about it here in our text. He says that because the Devil and his angels were hurled to the earth, therefore... *Woe to the earth and the sea because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury because he knows that his time is short*.

Do you realize what that means? It means that Satan is now a desperate killer. He's like that deranged gunman, who's holed up in his hotel room and knows that the authorities are closing in on him. Because he knows that his time is short, he uses everything in his power to create as much fear and pain and death as possible, while he still has time and ammunition. So it is with our Enemy, the Devil. The Devil knows that his fate is sealed. He knows he's been damned by God to the lake of burning sulfur. But until that final day of judgment comes, Satan is going to do everything in his power to create as much fear and pain and death as possible.

I mean, you see that, all around you, don't you? You know people who are hurting, be it physically or emotionally. They're struggling with addictions. They are suffering through the loss of a loved one, whether it's by death or by divorce. They're afraid of what the future might hold. They feel like they're being attacked on every side. Everything is going wrong. And they're wondering, "Why? Why is this happening to me?" In fact, maybe it's not just the people out

there who are thinking those things. Maybe we're the ones wondering, "God, why does my life have to be so hard? God, where are you when I need you? Sometimes it feels like you're just not there for me."

My friends, you realize, God answers all those questions right here in our text. Why do people experience such pain in this world? Why do even believers have to endure such hardships in life? Because, as St. John says, Satan *is filled with fury*. The fact is, Satan hates you. He hates the God who loves you. And therefore Satan going to do everything in his power to try to separate you from that God who loves you. If that means bringing pain and heartache and financial hardship into your life to help him achieve his goal, he's going to do that. Because that's who he is. You might say that Satan is the ultimate sore loser. He knows that he's going down. He knows that he's going to suffer. So he's going to do everything possible to make you suffer, too.

But here's the thing. That war that Satan is waging to separate you from God—Satan has already lost that war. He can't separate you from God's love—no matter how much pain he throws your way. How did St. Paul put it? *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:35,37)*. That's what allows St. Paul to draw the conclusion, *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, {39} neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)*

My friends, you realize, that's the impact which that war in heaven, waged so many years ago, still has on your life today. Nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ! Yes, you can expect that with his dying sword thrust, Satan is going to still going to try to bring some pain into your life. But he will never win the war. Jesus has already won the war. You belong to him. He is at your side every step of the way. And that means that when you breathe your last breath, those same angels who once fought the evil angels in the skies over Jerusalem on your behalf, the same angels whom God still commands to guard and protect you from harm, those same angels will carry your soul into the waiting arms of your Father in heaven, where you will be part of a victory celebration forever and ever. Amen.