

This Present Darkness • Ephesians 6:12

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We're going to do something just a little bit different. I've decided to share a message with you this morning that I have entitled, "This Present Darkness" and I have shamelessly stolen that from the apostle Paul. You thought I was going to say Frank Peretti, didn't you? No, he actually stole it from the apostle Paul.

It's a phrase that you find in Ephesians chapter 6, which we'll get to here this morning. But even though you can see on the slide there that Ephesians 6 is kind of listed as our title passage, this is really a continuation of our Sunday morning study through the Gospel of John. Because for the last couple of weeks, we've been focusing on how Jesus has been speaking to His disciples to prepare them for the days that are to come. And the difficulties that those days are going to bring, including the persecution, the suffering and, you know, the martyrdom, frankly, that they would experience.

And I believe that there is in those words that Jesus gave to His disciples, not just a word for them, but a word for us; a word of preparation and encouragement, frankly, that the Lord would convey to this present generation as well. Because I think you've probably all noticed, and I don't need to say this, we don't need to harp on this, but the world has changed.

In fact, just in the last 3 years, there's been incredible changes that have happened in our world. You know, I'm old enough to remember pretty well the last 50 years and I think the last 50 years have been a particularly huge watershed sort of time period for the change of culture.

You know, I think about when I was a kid. I remember in third grade going up to my teacher at her desk to get some help with a problem and seeing her Bible right there on the corner of her desk proudly displayed for anybody to see and nobody cared, you know. There was her Bible, big black leather bound Bible, just sitting on, and this is public school, right.

You know, my folks wouldn't have put me in anything else because my dad was the superintendent of the public school so that's what we did, that's where we, that's where we attended, you know. And here was her Bible just sitting there, you know. Just think about if a public school teacher did that today. Brought a

Bible, set it right on their desk, what do you think would happen? Yeah, you know, you can about imagine, can't you?

You know, also when I was in grade school, I've told you guys several times that, you know, every winter we put on a play at Christmas time commemorating the birth of Christ, in public school. I usually played Joseph, there weren't any lines, you just stood by this manger kind of looking down, that was pretty much the extent of the role, you know. But here we were in public school telling people about the birth of Jesus Christ.

I wonder what would happen if a public school teacher suggested today, let's put on a play commemorating the birth of Christ and get the whole school to come and be involved and sing Christmas carols and Christmas songs, stuff like that. Yeah, I think that would be rejected pretty quickly on the grounds of violating, you know, the separation of church and state or something like that.

We live in a world today where the 10 commandments have been successfully removed, we live in a world today that once proudly declared on our money, in God, we trust. But today, even though that remains written there, we all know that it's a hollow claim from the past and it no longer applies. Because as far as our country is concerned, in God we do not trust, we have turned to other gods.

And now in these past few years we have seen the rise of many things that frankly leave Christians and even a good number of unbelievers scratching their head in disbelief and wondering what in the world is going on in this culture in which we live. We are living in days where we have literally accepted insanity and I know that sounds strong, but I believe it to be true.

Behaviors that were once understood as a sign of mental illness are now celebrated as normal and good and that's the world we live in. Like it or not, and I'm sure you don't like it. But because you don't like it, and even at times are forced to stand in opposition to it, we are hated and despised. And that has been the theme of what we've been looking at in John chapter 15 and 16 over the last couple of weeks.

I want to share with you a quote from Franklin Graham, the son of Billy Graham up on the screen. It says, he said,

“Jesus told us the world hated [Him] first and they’re going to hate you. If you stand for Christ, the world is going to hate you. The world is deteriorating so quickly. It seems like every demon in hell has been turned loose.”

— **Franklin Graham (from a speech given at a Christian media convention • Orlando, Florida • May 22, 2023)**

That's an interesting quote, it's a strong quote. But it's an interesting quote from a man who has, he's probably about my age, he's probably lived long enough to see those changes over the last 50 years. He knows what kind of a world his dad started to preach the gospel in and what the world, you know, looks like today. And I believe that the Bible reveals that Franklin Graham is correct about, particularly about that last statement, that there are incredible spiritual battles that are currently going on.

And my goal today in the message that I want to share with you, that I really felt the Lord lay this on my heart, I'm going to show you through a multitude of Bible passages that this is something that is true and in fact the Bible predicted would take place. And that you are living in a time period that was foretold in the Word of God and I hope that doesn't frighten you.

In fact, my goal is not to frighten you I want you to know that. My goal at the end of this is to encourage you and my prayer is that you will leave this place today hopeful, in fact as it relates to these sorts of things. But we're going to begin to talk about some of these things from an Old Testament passage that I want to show you from Exodus chapter 15, up on the screen, it says this,

Exodus 15:11 (ESV)

“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?”

Now, this statement was made by Moses. In fact, it's included in what we call the Song of Moses, which he declared. I don't know if he actually sung it, but he declared it when God defeated Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. And he asks this interesting question, who are you among the gods? And I want you to notice that reference to, the gods and of course, that's a direct reference to the many pagan deities that Egypt or the Egyptians worshipped. And God showed through the plagues that He accomplished during that time that He was stronger than, more powerful than, all of the gods of Egypt.

But here's the question we have to ask when we read a verse like this, is the Bible truly giving credence to the existence of other gods? Because that's what

Moses says. He asked the question, you know, who are you? Who is like you among the gods? Well, the fact is the Bible does give credence to the existence of beings from our standpoint, the Bible refers to them as idols in the Old Testament, idols. And we know that an idol really is nothing at all. Paul, the apostle, talks about this in his letter in 1 Corinthians, where he says,

1 Corinthians 8:4-6 (ESV)

...we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords” — yet for us there is one God...

Now, this is an interesting statement and it's very important that you understand this verse or this passage that I've put up on the screen there for you. Paul says, for us, there is only one God, right? But he also acknowledges the existence of many gods, small g, and lords, small l, right? And what he's referring to are the rulers and powers and authorities that exist in the spirit realm, that's what he's acknowledged.

He's not saying there's a multiplicity of gods, there is only one creator, God, who is God overall. But there are principalities and powers and concerning these rulers and authorities, Paul wrote in Colossians chapter 1, verse 16.

Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

“For by him (and that is Jesus) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether (look at this) thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.”

So all the powers and authorities that exist, whether they're on earth or in the heavens, they were all created originally by Him and for Him. However, we know that something took place and the Bible tells us that there was a rebellion in the heavens that took place. It was led by Lucifer or Satan and as a result, many of these angels that held these positions of authority and power and rulership fell into darkness and became evil. And that is why the apostle Paul warns us in Ephesians, chapter 6, up on the screen.

Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

“...we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, (well, then who do we wrestle against?) but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”

Right, and he even gets more specific about identifying these powers in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, where he says,

1 Corinthians 10:19-20 (ESV)

What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

What's Paul saying here? He's making it clear that while idols are not real, the worship that people offered to those idols is real and those who receive that worship are demonic, okay. Because that's what demons want to do, they want to receive the worship of mankind. They want to usurp the place of God, so they received the worship of mankind. And in the Book of Daniel, we even get a small glimpse at how these spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places are interfering with God's work. Check this out, Daniel chapter 10.

Daniel 10:12-14 (ESV)

Then he said to me, “Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia, and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come.”

Now, this is an interesting passage. These princes and kings, that by the way, the Lord is speaking to Daniel about, are not human, they are spiritual beings. The prince of the kingdom of Persia that He makes reference to in that passage is a demonic overlord who controls that area of the world and restricts the work of God. And in this case, restricted the messenger of the Lord to bring that answer to Daniel's prayer in a timely way.

And then He mentions Michael. He says, Michael, your prince, because Michael is the prince over Israel and He says, Michael, your prince, he's who is a good angel obviously, fought to get that message through against the prince of the Persian kingdom. This is the kind of stuff that's going on, this is where the Bible gives us this little glimpse, and I guarantee you, it's just a little glimpse, of what is going on in the spirit realm.

We are oblivious to it, other than the Word of God making us aware. We don't know this stuff's happening, we don't know there's battles going on, spiritually. We had no concept, no clue and yet the Bible says these things are really happening.

Now, one of the questions that I get asked somewhat frequently has to do with demons and possession. And we, you know, when people read the Bible and particularly the gospels, they talk about the fact that, wow, Jesus really encountered a lot of demoniacs. I mean, there was people, you know, He'd come into an area and these demoniacs would just freak out, you know, or the demons would anyway, who were inhabiting these individuals and He cast out all these demons.

And the question comes many times, why don't we see the same level of demonic activity and even demon possession that we seem to see in the Bible and that Jesus confronted during His earthly ministry? And I've always considered that a fairly good question, frankly. But the answer begins to materialize when we understand through the Bible how the cross of Jesus Christ and the gospel dealt an enormous blow to demon worship that went along with paganism.

Something huge happened when Jesus came and the propagation of the gospel after His ascension also began a powerful work of the Lord to combat the work of demons. I want you to check out Colossians chapter 2, look what this says. He says, Paul says,

Colossians 2:13-15 (ESV)

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

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trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (now, I want you to notice this last sentence) He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.” (or your Bible may say, in the cross)

This is a fascinating passage that Paul gives us here in Colossians. He says that through the cross, Jesus was not only a victor over sin and death, He was a victor over the enemy. He was a victor over the work of demons among mankind. It was a powerful move, it was a spiritual bomb that went off when Jesus died on the cross, cleansing great areas of the world, and then the gospel began to go out and change lives. And you know, Luke records for us in the Book of Acts how the gospel literally changed the landscape of paganism, check this out. It says,

Acts 19:17-20 (ESV)

And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily.

“And fear fell upon them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled. Also many of those who were now believers came, confessing and divulging their practices. (these are occultic, pagan practices) And a number of those who had practiced magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. (they did it out in public) And they counted the value of them and found it came to fifty thousand pieces of silver. So the word of the Lord continued to increase (and look at this) and prevail mightily.”

Did you catch that? The Word prevailed, what did it prevail over? Darkness. It prevailed over darkness. The light of the gospel burst into the darkness that had so enveloped the world at that time, that it just created this huge, powerful wave of freedom. Freedom from this work of demonic oppression and possession that had just gripped the world. And so, when we come, that's one of the reasons why, you know, I've told you guys before for a long time. I don't believe that it's possible for a born again Christian to have a demon, there are Christians who do believe that, but I don't.

And the reason is, I don't believe it, is because when we come to Christ, we establish new rulership in our lives. We may have been under rulership from the world, from the prince of this world before we came to Christ, but you come to

Jesus, you come under new ownership. You come under new rulership and it's a rulership that Satan cannot breach, okay?

In fact, one of the passages that I like to quote when somebody says, why don't you believe Christians can be demonically possessed is Colossians 2:9 and 10, look what it says.

Colossians 2:9-10 (ESV)

For in [Jesus] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

See, when you accept Jesus Christ, you receive Him, you receive His Holy Spirit in you, right? Well, who have you received? You've received the head of all rule and authority. You think He's going to put up with another rule or authority inside of you? Are you joking? No, this is what the gospel does, the gospel sets us free.

It is just, you know, we, as Christians, you know, we, I don't know, we downplay the power of the gospel sometimes, the power of the Word of God, when it's accepted by someone to set them free to, the power to change their lives. And now this victory that Jesus won over the principalities and powers through the cross is explained to us and expressed in Ephesians 1, check this out.

Ephesians 1:19-21 (ESV)

...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

“...and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, (look at this) far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, (that’s talking about earthly and spiritual) and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”

That's the victory of Jesus Christ. Isn't that glorious? Isn't that wonderful? That He is victory has set us free from darkness. We've been birthed into the light and it's a glorious, wonderful thing. In fact, Paul tells us the victory of Jesus was

declared even to the rulers and authorities in the spirit realm. Look at Ephesians 3, he says,

Ephesians 3:8-10 (ESV)

To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, (look at this) so that through the church (that’s you, that’s you) the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities (where?) in the heavenly places.”

Do you understand that God is constantly declaring through you and me, the manifold wisdom of God in heavenly places to rulers and authorities? He's declaring that victory through you and me and that's why the enemy is gunning for you and me. Because we're constantly through our lives, declaring the victory of Jesus Christ over the darkness and so he wants desperately to try to extinguish the light that is in you through Jesus Christ.

So, you know, we can see from the Word that the coming of Jesus, the victory that He won for us on the cross, we can see that it dealt this huge blow to the spiritual world of darkness and evil. I hope you can see that and I hope that encourages you and, you know, nations like ours. Like the United States of America, that originally embraced Christianity, that was founded on the principles of Christianity. Nations like ours flourished, this nation flourished because it was founded on biblical principles and we have walked for many years in great blessing because of it.

But those days are over, those days are gone. God, as I said, has now been evicted, removed from the United States, and obviously from several other nations as well. And that means that when God is pushed out, there is now an emptiness, there is now a void, but that emptiness won't last for long. Whenever there is emptiness, it's going to be filled with something. As I said, when I was a kid, you know, my teacher had her Bible right there front and center on her desk. Well, that's not there anymore, it's not allowed. So when that's not

allowed, something else will be allowed, are you with me? Do you understand that principle? Things don't stay empty forever

The eviction of God from the United States has left an emptiness and then what we learn is that when God is removed, something is going to fill that emptiness and it's not good. And Jesus actually gave us some insights into this process in Matthew chapter 12, check it out on the screen. He said,

Matthew 12:43-45 (ESV)

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

“When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, (look at this) and the last state of that person is worse than the first. (you might be reading this and thinking, well, pastor Paul, but that's talking about a person. Yeah, but read the last sentence) So also will it be with this evil generation.”

What evil generation is Jesus referring to? Any evil generation that rejects God and His Word, any evil generation. Jesus is showing us here that this principle of kicking God out, kicking out the Word of God is going to leave a vacuum of void that will not long stay empty, it will be filled. And Jesus gave us insights into the spirit realm when He talked about the fact that a demon returns to where it once inhabited and finds it empty and swept clean. Which, of course, is very difficult for a demon to take hold of because he is a being of chaos and if there's order there, he has to go get other demons to come along with him, some more evil than himself and they together inhabit that individual and generation. And it's worse off than it was before and that is what we are seeing now.

We are seeing here in the United States of America, the rise of paganism, or I should say the return of paganism. The return of the gods of paganism. By the way, the gods of paganism didn't go away, they never went away, the gods that were behind the idols. Remember an idol is nothing at all, but they worshipped demonic authorities, principalities, and powers, and they haven't gone anywhere and they are still seeking a foothold in the lives of mankind.

How can you tell when paganism arrives? You might say, well, pastor Paul, how do you know paganism is reasserting itself here in the United States? I don't remember seeing my neighbor having a little idol in their home or something like that. Oh, maybe we've outgrown that sort of a thing but the one thing that is true about paganism is that paganism has many gods.

You know, the God of the Bible, there's one God and that means there's one truth. But with the gods of paganism, there's of course many gods and therefore there are many truths. And when you begin to see many truths being displayed and propagated in the culture, you know that we've returned to paganism.

There's not just one truth, there's many truths. There's not just one way, there's many ways. There's not just one path, there are now many paths. That is a telltale sign of paganism. And along with all of those many ways and many truths that people like to talk about, well, it might be true for me, even though it isn't true for you and that kind of ridiculous sort of stuff. Along with all those beliefs and ideologies come behaviors that defy any sane explanation. And that is exactly what the Apostle Paul told us would happen in 1 Timothy chapter 4 verse 1, when he said,

1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

...the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...

“...the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith (which is the one truth of the one God) by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits (look at this) and teachings of demons...”

I truly believe that the crazy, insane ideologies that are taking this world by storm and being propagated today in our culture are nothing more than the teachings of demons. Well, I say nothing more, but it has grabbed our culture by the throat and they have embraced it, swallowed it, hook, line and sinker because they rejected the true God and the true Word of God and therefore they're open to anything. Now they're open to anything because the truth has been trampled underfoot, now anything goes. The Apostle Paul goes on to say in 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (ESV)

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, (in other words, a single truth from the Word) but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth (the one truth of God) and (they will) wander off into myths.”

And because of the lack of a gospel of truth and the hope that comes with it, we're told in the Bible that the culture will turn violent and cruel, we're told this. Jesus said it Himself, look at Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:12 (ESV)

And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

“And because lawlessness will be increased, (He's talking about the last days) the love of many will grow cold.”

Love in every way, love for your neighbor, love for anyone, anything and the Apostle Paul added this in 2 Timothy chapter 3.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

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Wow! Now, I understand that all of this seems rather dire and maybe a little bit hopeless. But as I said, when I started off, the last thing I want to do is leave you feeling hopeless or fearful. Because you need to understand that as a child of God, you and I have been given everything we need to endure what's going on in these final days.

God always gives the grace, where God guides, God provides. If He has led you and brought you to this place in history, He will prepare you for it and equip

you for it and He will give you the necessary strength to stand in the midst of this world and that is what we're called to do. Brothers and sisters in Jesus, we are called to stand. Not be belligerent, not be angry, not to shake our fist, but to stand, to stand in the strength and power of God.

You know, I've used Ephesians chapter 6 as kind of the title of this whole message, but I'm going to read the whole passage now essentially to you, verses 10 through 13. It says, *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. (not yours, His) ¹¹ Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. ¹³ Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm."*

And that means, after all is said and done, after all the battles are fought, you're still standing. You're standing, you're standing for truth, you're standing for honor, you're standing for God.

You know, when we understand these concepts, that what is being propagated in the world, the ideologies, the beliefs are actually the worship of devils, demons, and that they are propagated by the enemy, it puts it in a completely different perspective. When somebody says, I want you to honor my personal gender identification, my response is, I already worship a God that you don't know and I will not kneel or bow to yours and that's the bottom line.

We as Christians are being told that in order to be compassionate we have to go along with what they're doing. I don't plan on ever going along with what Satan is propagating, never. Even in the name of compassion, that is not compassionate. To lead someone along lines of deception, it's not compassionate, it's not loving.

Now, we're not to hate them, we're not to belittle them, we're not to berate them. We're to love them, but not in darkness. We are to speak the truth in love and that means stand. After all is said and done, stand with the Word of God in your mouth and the power and the grace of God in your heart.

You know, I was going to actually finish John 16 today. In fact, I went through it and I started studying it and I was going to finish the rest of the chapter today. But then the Lord interrupted me and said, no, I want you to do this instead. But you know, had I finished the Book of John today, I would have ended with a

lovely, lovely verse that I want to end this message with. It's John 16:33, Jesus speaking here, He says,

John 16:33 (ESV)

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

This system of darkness and false ideologies and behavior that is unspeakably vile, that I know, can get you down from time to time. Can even cause depression in some lovely saints. I want you to know something, Jesus has overcome the world. He is the victor, and we, by faith, enter into His victory, amen?

Let's stand together, we're going to close. Bill Norris is one of our elders, I'm going to ask him to come up and close us in prayer. What a wonderful peace we have in the midst of the darkness that we're facing and we don't know what that is, but we do know His peace. Let's pray.

Our heavenly Father, we have heard Your Word and we ask for your presence here with us, Your Spirit to be here and to communicate that to us. And, Lord, we believe that you have done that to our hearts.

And now, Lord, we ask that you remind us to encourage us and as we go from here, Lord, help us to remember you in the Word that we've heard. We ask your Holy Spirit to go with us now in Jesus name, amen.