

"From **D**ark **D**ays . . . A Bright Hope"
Isaiah 11:1 – 12:6
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The title of this lecture is "From Dark Days... A Bright Hope." I call this my **D** lecture – "From **D**ark **D**ays of **D**estruction . . . (to) A **D**ivine **D**ominion of **D**elight."

The Prince of **D**arkness, the King of Evil, put a letter **D** in front of evil, we have the **D**evil. The **D**evil has a **d**esire to create **d**arkness, to cause **d**ivision, to **d**amage and to **d**estroy. This is cleverly **d**esigned and **d**eveloped through **d**eception.

We will look at

- 1. How God's Goodness is Displayed**
- 2. How the Devil uses Deceptions and Distractions to Conquer the World**
- 3. How the Devil Divides and Destroys People and Relationships**
- 4. How God uses His Divine Dominion to Dominate the Devil**
- 5. How to Remain Faithful to God's Calling**

I had recently gutted my yard and started new. (It's amazing how costly that was.) I kept a few fruit trees and to prevent them from getting too overgrown, I had them pruned. I'm very frugal so instead of hiring a professional, I hired my son who had no experience whatsoever in taking care of any living thing, (human or nonhuman). Oh, that's not true. He had a lizard once. Had. I asked him if he would prune my persimmon tree, and he agreed. How many of you like persimmons? It's a weird fruit. You either love it or hate it. Well, hate is a harsh word, dislike it.

If you don't know what it is, it is a sweet, orange-colored fruit, technically a berry, that is known for its honey-like flavor. A Fuyu persimmon is sweet, firm, and crispy. You eat it like an apple. The Hachiya is an astringent persimmon meaning it has a high level of a chemical called tannin which is a bitter, chalky taste in the unripe fruit, but tannin decreases as the fruit ripens. You don't want to eat it even if it's partially ripe. It leaves this nasty, bitter taste on your tongue which doesn't fade easily. Christians can be referred to as fruits from a vine. Some are bitter (Christians claim to be Christians, but don't behave like one), some are sweet (fully faithful Christians), and some are little of both. Those could be called "Casual Christians" or "Christians for Conveniency."

Why am I bringing this up? In verse 1, it says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse, from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." "Judah (the royal line of David) would be like a tree chopped down to a stump. But from that stump a new shoot would grow – the Messiah. He would be greater than the original tree and would bear much fruit." (Life Application Study Bible, NIV)

When I saw the work of my son's pruning skills, I thought he killed it. He didn't even leave one branch hanging off that tree. It was a complete bare stump. But year after year, it grows bigger and fuller, and it becomes "greater than the original tree and would bear much fruit." We could look at our lives the same way. When we come to Jesus, the Messiah, we cut off (kill) our old life (pride, control, etc.). "For in Messiah, from every cut-down trunk (tree), will come forth a shoot of something far better." (Sapphire@hopeoftheworld.org).

2 Samuel 7:16 confirms, "The Messiah is the fulfillment of God's promise that a descendant of David would rule forever."

In the Messiah, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord— and he will delight in the fear of the Lord." (v. 2-3) Jesus has these attributes as He said in John 5:19, "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does." This is **How God's Goodness is on Display**.

The characteristics of the Spirit are self-explanatory, but let's examine the latter statement about "fear of the Lord" and "delight in the fear." That sounds like an oxymoron. How can fear be a delight?

Feelings and emotions are not necessarily bad. We can view stress in the same way. Too much stress can be harmful to your health, but too little is not good either. Not enough stress can cause a lack of motivation and lead to unproductivity. It's not uncommon to hear about 30-year-olds still living at home, jobless, and playing video games seemingly without stress and fear.

No doubt, too much fear can cause paranoia. People have all kinds of fear. Just for fun, help me identify these fears:

1. Fear of heights is called _____. (Acrophobia)
2. Fear of confined spaces. (Claustrophobic)
3. Fear of spiders. (Arachnophobia)
4. Fear of leaving the house. (Agoraphobia)

One of the fastest growing phobias is nomophobia. Any idea of what this fear may be? The fear of being without a mobile phone. (Yes, there is such a thing and we have a name for it.)

Fear can be used as form of protection. How many of you were afraid of your parents? Parents want what's best for us, and they instill this fear to serve as a safety rail. I was so afraid of my father or dad (going back to my letter Ds), and my husband couldn't understand why because my father was this scrawny little Chinese man about 5'4". (I looked down at him, not figuratively, literally.) I feared him as I should, and I

remember pondering over that based on my husband's comment. I concluded it was due to respect because it came from act of caring.

Sometimes, fear is God's way of protecting us. Just like the fear many of us felt toward our parents growing up; not a fear rooted in terror (or maybe), but in reverence and love. We didn't want to disappoint them because we knew their guidance came from a place of deep concern. In the same way, godly fear isn't meant to trap us, it's meant to guard us, to serve as a holy boundary. Like loving parents, God sets limits not to punish us, but to protect us and lead us safely in His will. What a great **Display of God's Goodness**.

Here is one of my all-time favorite verses. It's on my frig mainly as a reminder for my children. "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." (Hebrews 12:11)

In verses 3b-5, it says the Messiah will judge the world, but not like ordinary judges who rule by what they see with their eyes and what they hear with their ears. Truth, in this matter, can get distorted as described in Ecclesiastes 8:14 "...the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve...". It's not uncommon to see this in our world today.

Quite often, I'd witness this scenario. A mother with her children while distracted, a young child taunting an older sibling. Older siblings have learned to not retaliate because it doesn't matter who starts the fight, the older child "should know better" as a parent would say. Right, older siblings? Where are you? Raise your hand if you are the oldest. I wasn't the oldest so I wouldn't know, but you know how this story ends. Who gets in trouble? It's almost always the older one. As the older child attempts to stop the younger sibling from further irritating him/her, the mother turns around "just in time" to witness this behavior. Unjust? But no more.

This will not happen with the Messiah. The future King will rule and judge with a supernatural perception and won't need to catch things "just in time" or rely on hearsay. His judgment will be flawless. He will reign with righteousness and faithfulness as if they were necessary parts of His clothing like a belt and sash.

This leads us to harmony. When our dogs passed away, I vowed not to have dogs again or any pets for that matter. Of course, my kids plead with me promising they would take care of them. You know how that story ends. Who ends up taking care of the animals? Almost always the parents. Well, then COVID hit. Needless to say, we ended up with pets. You heard right, "petsssss." The cutest two kittens, siblings from the same litter. They eat together, sleep together, and play together. To make a long story short, I recently discovered that not all cats do this specifically if they don't come

from the same litter. This is true for both my sisters who have cats. Although, I have heard and seen videos of cats and dogs getting along. So, what's my point?

Verse 6-8 describes this utopia. "The wolf will live with the lamb..." (v. 6a) "The cow will feed with the bear..." (v. 7a) "The infant will play near the hole of the cobra..." (v. 8a) ..." How can this be? When we belong to the Kingdom of God, we have Unity. We have ONE FATHER, ONE GOD. We become brothers and sisters. Matthew 12:50 (ESV) says, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." Just like my cats, we are from one litter. And from this one litter, there is a time when All can eat, sleep, and play together, **A Display of God's Goodness.**

John 3:3 (NKJV) "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" When we are born again, we can see and be a part of His Kingdom. This utopian era is known as the Millennial Kingdom—also called the Millennium—which refers to the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth as described in the book of Revelation.

Have you ever been on a tour where, before getting back on the bus, the tour guide holds up a flag to gather everyone together? That flag is a signal, a way to call the group back, making sure no one is left behind. God does something very similar. He raises a banner, not a literal flag, but a clear sign to gather His faithful people, the remnant, and bring them back to the Promised Land. These people had been scattered across many regions: Assyria, Upper and Lower Egypt, Cush (modern-day Sudan and Ethiopia), Elam (now Iran), Babylonia (now Iraq), Hamath (part of today's Syria), and from the islands across the sea. Just like a tour guide calling the group back together, God lovingly calls His people back, those who remained faithful, to restore them and bring them home.

As you know, this wasn't the first time they were exiled. Time and time again, they disobeyed God and were scattered as a result. It's easy for us to look at their story and think, "Seriously? Haven't they learned by now?" But before we judge, let's remember that old saying: when you point a finger at someone else, there are three fingers pointing back at you.

The Devil's Deceptions and Distractions: We know we are sinners and thank you, Jesus, for our salvation. But we can fall short, time and time again. Have you ever said this to yourself or know someone who has...

1. I didn't get a good night sleep. I'm exhausted. I think I'm going to skip church today.
2. I'm in a hurry. I'll just park in this 10-minute zone. No one will know.
3. That sure is a long line. I should be okay in this "15-items or less" line. I only have 17 items.

We may believe these actions are harmless and minor (exactly what Satan wants us to believe), but it's an open-door invitation for him to come into our lives. Imagine this – every time we're unfaithful, every time we're disobedient, Satan makes a tally mark. Yes, he's keeping score and celebrating these minor victories.

When I was in high school, I read the novel *1984*, written in 1949 by George Orwell. It was a warning about the dangers of totalitarianism and the potential for "Big Brother" technology to be used for mass surveillance and control. I remember my teacher telling us that one day, even libraries would be able to track which books we check out. At the time, I couldn't fathom that could ever being possible. Yet here we are.

In 1965 (60 years ago), the legendary commentator Paul Harvey delivered a prophetic radio broadcast titled *"If I Were the Devil,"* in which he warned about the future spiritual decline of the United States. Let's look and see what Mr. Harvey had to say.

*If I were the devil ... If I were the Prince of Darkness, I'd want to engulf the whole world in darkness. And I'd have a third of its real estate, and four-fifths of its population, but I wouldn't be happy until I had seized the **ripest apple** (that's you) on the tree — Thee. So, I'd set about however necessary to take over the United States. (Why the United States? The United States has been referred to as "God's Country" to signify a land chosen and blessed by God. God is referenced four times in The Declaration of Independence.)*

I'd subvert the churches first — I'd begin with a campaign of whispers. With the wisdom of a serpent, I would whisper to you as I whispered to Eve: 'Do as you please.' (In other words, "You do you and I'll do me.")

"To the young, I would whisper that 'The Bible is a myth.' I would convince them that man created God instead of the other way around. I would confide that what's bad is good, and what's good is 'square.' (That's been evident with criminals and law enforcements.) And the old, I would teach to pray, after me, 'Our Father, which art in Washington ... (This is a critique of the growing dependency on the government rather than on God and faith.)

"And then I'd get organized. I'd educate authors in how to make lurid literature exciting, so that anything else would appear dull and uninteresting. I'd threaten TV with dirtier movies and vice versa. (Have you noticed that movies rated PG-13 today would have been rated R in the past?) I'd pedal narcotics to whom I could. I'd sell alcohol to ladies and gentlemen of distinction. I'd tranquilize the rest with pills. (You know, since when did we start selling alcohol along with candy and popcorn in the theaters? And as far as pills - In my 30 years of teaching, I've never seen as many students on medication as I do today. The most common are antidepressants and anti-anxiety medications. In the future, it could be hormone-blockers.)

"If I were the devil I'd soon have families that war with themselves, churches at war with themselves, and nations at war with themselves; until each in its turn was consumed. (I don't know about you, but over the past five years, I've definitely noticed a shift in our society, especially in how we think about others, how we treat one another, and how little self-control we show when dealing with people we disagree with. It's gotten to the point where some can't even stand to be in the same room as those who see things differently, even among families. It's not uncommon for Christians to dislike other Christians even though we are from the same litter. Naturally we like socializing with like-minded people. But in Matthew 5:47 it claims "... if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" So "Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters." (Hebrews 13:1) And "...love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,"⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:44 - 45a))

And with promises of higher ratings I'd have mesmerizing media fanning the flames. (The news isn't what it used to be. It's not all factual anymore.) *If I were the devil I would encourage schools to refine young intellects, but neglect to discipline emotions — just let those run wild, until before you knew it, you'd have to have drug sniffing dogs and metal detectors at every schoolhouse door.* (Today, many school districts in California have a policy authorizing the use of metal detectors and contraband detection dogs.)

"Within a decade I'd have prisons overflowing, I'd have judges promoting pornography — soon I could evict God from the courthouse, then from the schoolhouse, and then from the houses of Congress. And in His own churches I would substitute psychology for religion, and deify science. I would lure priests and pastors into misusing boys and girls, and church money. If I were the devil I'd make the symbols of Easter an egg and the symbol of Christmas a bottle.

"If I were the devil I'd take from those who have, and give to those who want until I had killed the incentive of the ambitious. (I see this in the school system - equity over merit.)

And what do you bet I could get whole states to promote gambling as the way to get rich? (Did you know California as 76 casinos and two more to open soon, Hard Rock Casino in Kern County and North Fork in Madera County.) *I would caution against extremes and hard work in Patriotism, in moral conduct. I would convince the young that marriage is old-fashioned, that swinging is more fun, that what you see on the TV is the way to be.* (One might say, "Let's live together before we get married". That's if they get married.) *And thus, I could undress you in public, and I could lure you into bed with diseases for which there is no cure* (AIDs, herpes, genital warts are caused by viruses. We don't have cures for viruses). *In other words, if I were the devil I'd just keep right on doing what he's doing."*

You could imagine how ludicrous that might have sounded back in the 1960's, but here we are.

How the Devil uses Deceptions and Detractions. My question to you is: how did we get here? We now live in a culture where speech is limited to avoid offending anyone or hurting another's feelings, and to always show compassion. And yes, isn't that what Christians are instructed to do, show love, grace, and compassion? Don't talk about politics, religion, or anything controversial. What better way to silence people, especially believers, than to discourage honest conversations about the very issues that shape our world.

We're reminded in Revelation 3:16 not to settle for being mediocre. It says, "So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth." (. . . you bitter fruit.) I added the last part. But wow, that was pretty blunt. He's saying, don't just sit on the fence. Either be in or out, just don't be flavorless. This is a serious reminder that faith isn't meant to be half-hearted. God desires full commitment, not casual belief or when it's convenient. Lukewarm living may feel safe or comfortable, but it can have devastating effects on our world.

You may have heard of this famous quote, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." While often attributed to Edmund Burke, there's been some debate over its true origin. It's believed that a similar idea was first expressed by John Stuart Mill, who said in 1867: "Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing."

A more important question we should ask ourselves is "What kind of fruit do you want to be?" We all should strive to be a fully ripe sweet fruit. And what does that look like? We'll come back to this. I'm going to leave you hanging.

How the Devil Divides and Destroys People and Relationships

Satan knows how to push our buttons by using people who have a different political view, a different moral compass, and don't conform to what we think is "normal" or "right." Have you fallen victim to his scheme? Are you riding on his merry-go-round of hate, anger, and resentment? In the name of Jesus, "victim no more." Get off the horse of hate. If God could bring two enemies together as he did with Ephraim and Judah in verse 13b-14, "Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim . . . together they will plunder the people to the east," God can do what we think may be impossible.

How God uses His Divine Dominion to Dominate the Devil

God is so good. No matter how unfaithful we have been, no matter what sin we have committed, He offers repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation through the blood of Jesus Christ because of His desire to maintain a relationship with us.

We see this in verses 15-16. Isaiah talks about a new or second exodus when the remnant of God's people returned to Judah by means of walking across water (Not on water. Only Jesus could do that and Paul) but walking through water which was once a large body of water. This is just as when God split the Red Sea when Moses led his people out of Egypt (Exodus 14:21-22) and when Joshua led the people into the Promised Land carrying the Ark of the Covenant across the Jordan River (Joshua 1:2). In both cases, God created dry ground. What is interesting about this dry ground is that it was broken into seven streams. According to Troy Brewer, 7 means the Spirit of God, a number that marks where God is doing something by His Spirit. Look at the days of the week. The seventh day is designated as the Sabbath. A day of rest. A day of worship with our Almighty God. It symbolizes completion and perfection.

Back to how we could strive to be a fully ripe sweet fruit. According to Ines Franklin who wrote "**How to Remain Faithful to God's Calling**" or in other words, how does God use His **Divine Dominion** to **Dominate** the **Devil**? When we accept Christ as our Lord and Savior, He equips us with the tools to **defeat** the **devil**. Franklin suggests we strengthen our faith through these practices:

1. Read God's Word daily (2 Timothy 3:16)
2. Be obedient to the Holy Spirit's guidance (Act 5:32)
3. Pray constantly (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
4. Seek wise counsel and submit to others to hold us accountable (Proverbs 11:14)

She had 4 points, but 5 seems to be more complete so let me add one more.

5. Serve others (1 Peter 4:10) Actually, 7 points would make it more complete, but we're running out of time so let's move on.

Chapter 12 concludes with 1) a call to trust 2) a call to witness and 3) a call to praise. Verse 2 (trust), "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid." Verse 4 (witness) "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done and proclaim that his name is exalted." Verse 5 (praise) "Sing to the Lord, for he has done glorious things (in your life and mine); let this be known to all the world." What a reminder for us in our world today – trust, witness and praise. While Isaiah's audience was waiting for the Messiah, we know He's been here in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ Who will one day come again.

Please stand as we sing with praise, and I'll close in prayer.

Closing prayer:

Father God, you are a good God. No matter what we do and where we are on our walk with You, You continue to offer us a seat at Your table. Help us to come willingly and wholeheartedly—to sit with You, to grow and mature in Your presence, bearing fruit that is full and sweet. Let us soak in Your goodness and fully enjoy the love and blessings You have stored up for us. I plead all this in the Name of Jesus. Amen.