

WHEN JESUS SHOWS UP EARLY

For all of the theologians among us, I ask for your indulgence today with regard to my title. I do realize that Jesus doesn't ever show up too early, and that – in the words of the old song – He is always “right on time.” However, you will have to admit that many times in the Bible (and today) His disciples thought He was too late (!) – on a boat, at a tomb, etc. But, the real title of this message probably should have been, “When Jesus Shows Up Earlier Than You Ever Thought He Would Arrive.” ☺

Revelation 12:10-12 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! **for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.**

Matthew 8:28-32 And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? **art thou come hither to torment us before the time?** And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters.

Matthew 8:29 (MSG) Seeing Jesus, the madmen screamed out, "What business do you have giving us a hard time? You're the Son of God! **You weren't supposed to show up here yet!**"

Researcher George Barna found that only 40% of Americans believe that Satan is a living being. It is little better in the church, where 69% of Catholics and 65% of Protestants believe the notion of Satan is only symbolic of evil. But if Satan is not an actual person, then we have little use at all for the Bible, for God's Word centers around an ongoing conflict between God and Lucifer. Mankind became involved in this conflict in the Garden of Eden when he became the unwitting pawn of the devil's revenge on God. Satan had a choice to serve God and refused; he is jealous of mankind's choice – and our chance to repent – and wants to insure that we refuse also!

The conflict recklessly rampages through man's history. Satan was successful in leading Adam and Eve into sin, but God intervened in a redemptive act and spoke this promise:

Genesis 3:15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

From that moment, Satan began working on his plans to launch a preemptive strike against God by aborting the line through which the Messiah was to come. He wanted to stop the people of God at all costs!

- He filled Cain with enough hatred to murder his righteous brother Abel. God just raised up righteous Seth.
- He led mankind into enough wickedness that God destroyed the world in a flood. God just raised up Noah.
- He deceived men with false religions that worshipped the gods of nature. God just raised up Abraham.
- He caused Pharaoh to issue a death warrant for all Hebrew baby boys. But God thwarted his plan through Pharaoh's own daughter ... and the opportune tears of a baby named Moses.
- He tempted Israel into lustful orgies before a golden calf. God just raised up the sons of Levi.
- He bribed the prophet Balaam to curse the nation of Israel. God just took control of Balaam's tongue.
- He frightened the spies with the giants of the land of Canaan. God just raised up Joshua and Caleb.
- He tried to starve out the nation through the raids of the Midianites. God just raised up Gideon.
- He bound Samson with cords of lust that he could not break, and handed him over to the Philistines to rot in a prison. But God gave Samson his greatest victory when he repented in his lowest moment.
- He polluted the priesthood of Israel through the wickedness of Eli's sons. God just raised up Samuel.
- He snared King Saul with the sin of pride. God just raised up a man after his own heart named David.
- He caused Queen Athaliah to kill of the royal seed. God just used Jehoiada the priest to hide little Joash.
- He helped Haman hatch his plot of genocide against the Jews. God just raised up Queen Esther.

Satan tried to tempt Jesus to give up the Incarnation. He whipped up a storm on the Galilee in an attempt to drown the sleeping Jesus. He incited angry townspeople to try and throw Jesus off a precipice. He stirred up the hatred of the Pharisees and Chief Priests until they were successful in orchestrating the crucifixion. He even used a disciple to betray Jesus at His arrest! But the resurrection foiled all Satan's plans!

Satan doesn't want you to know that he is powerless to stop the church – THERE WILL BE A CHURCH (THERE IS ALREADY A CHURCH!). The only thing he can do is get you to listen to him and stay out of the church!

Satan has many tactics that he uses on the church to try to defeat us:

- He accuses (Revelation 12:10)
- He condemns (1 Timothy 3:6)
- He devours (1 Peter 5:8)
- He imprisons (Revelation 2:10)
- He ensnares (2 Timothy 2:26)
- He takes advantage (2 Corinthians 2:11)
- He steals the Word away (Mark 4:15)
- He works miracles (Revelation 16:14)
- He has his own doctrines (1 Timothy 4:1)
- He uses false prophets, false Christs, evil men and seducers (Matthew 24:11, 2 Timothy 3:13)
- He disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14)

Satan is indeed a powerful and vicious opponent, but he labors under one crippling fact – his dreaded sentence of eternal imprisonment without the possibility of parole! He works under this terrifying reality every moment of his existence, and he knows that HIS TIME IS SHORT! That is a theological, eschatological FACT. But to add insult to injury, sometimes God even steps over those prophetic “boundaries” – that is what was happening when Jesus “**showed up early**” in Matthew 8! These demons knew they were not destined for judgment until after the Millennium. It was much too early for their scheduled time of torment, and yet they sensed that Jesus was about to interrupt their evil work.

The incident with the demoniacs in Matthew 8 shows us:

- What **SATAN** does for a man in need – robs him of sanity and self-control, robs him of the joys of home and friends, makes him hurt himself, and condemns him to an eternity of judgment.
- What **SOCIETY** does for a man in need – restrains him, isolates him, even threatens him, but is ultimately unable to change him.
- What **JESUS** does for a man in need – embraces him, delivers him, restores him, and gives him eternal life!

The devil may have convinced you (or you may have reasoned it out yourself) that it's going to take God a LONG time to answer your prayer, deliver you, or fill you with the Holy Ghost. But that kind of reasoning doesn't account for miracles!

WHAT IS A MIRACLE? IT'S WHEN JESUS SHOWS UP EARLY!
(and our God has proved Himself to be a miracle-working God!)