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## SATANIC AGENCY:

A Sermon, delivered before the "Ministers' Meeting" of the Rappahannock Association, March 29, 1850, by REV. A. BROADBENT. Published by request.

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*"Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."*—1 Pet. v: 8.

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Christ came into the world "to bring life and immortality to light." He appeared on earth that he might open up a way to the throne of God, and might invite sinners to enter that way and live forever. In the accomplishment of this great purpose, he made known not only the perfections of God—his attributes of love, mercy and power—the glories of heaven and the happiness of the blessed in another world, more clearly than these things had ever been exhibited or known before—but he also drew aside the curtain which veiled the mysteries of eternal punishment, and opened to our view the horrors of the world of woe. He showed us a vast dreary waste, peopled by innumerable intelligences, all subject to one supreme ruler. I say to one supreme ruler: for the scripture clearly indicates the fact, that among the lost spirits and fallen angels, there is one who exercises a controlling authority. Indeed, the title by which this being is recognized in scripture, is alone a strong proof of the truth we have just stated. For while all the other fallen angels are called demons (*δαιμονιοι*), he alone is called the devil (*διαβολος*); the scripture thus attributing to him a pre-

eminence both in wickedness and in power. It is this being and his operations who will engage our attention on the present occasion; and we would direct our notice to

1. *The vastness of his power.* It is an undisputed sentiment, that impressions produced on the mind in childhood, exercise a powerful influence on the sentiments and conduct in after life. This sentiment finds an exemplification in the impressions frequently produced on the young mind, by the representations of the devil, with which youth is often favored by instructors or parents. The creature of hoofs, horns and tail, that frightens our youthful fancy, excites only the smile of maturer years, and along with the false representation, the thing represented is too often depreciated. Persons thus often learn to regard the devil as merely an ideal being; or, at most, as very limited in his power, and as capable of inflicting little or no injury on the human race. Perhaps, too, the representations above named may have had some influence in inducing the belief, that the Satan of the Bible is a mere *prosopopœia*—a personification of the principle of evil. I have time only to say, that this opinion is as unscriptural as it is unphilosophical and irrational. One expression alone, used by Paul in his letter to the Ephesian church, establishes both the personality and the power of the devil and his satellites. "For we wrestle not," says the apostle, "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."\* Taking it for granted, then, that the personality of Satan is clearly taught in the scriptures, I observe that the vastness of his power is indicated

1. By the extent of his dominions. He is the king of hell. What may be the extent of this place (for I think it is a place,) we cannot tell, with certainty, though probably it is vast even beyond our conceptions. This dreary region is filled with millions upon millions of fallen angels, of whom he is not only the acknowledged sovereign, but the complete controller. This fact is indicated by our Lord when he says, "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."† Here these beings

\* Eph. vi: 12.

† Matt. xxv: 41.

are called his angels, ministers, or servants. And again the apostle, in describing the hosts of hell, says, "And they had a king over them which is the angel of the bottomless pit."\* But beside the vast power thus exercised by the devil over the fallen angels, it is probable he controls the departed spirits of wicked men. Having exercised a powerful influence over their minds, hearts and actions on earth—having lured them on to eternal destruction—after they have passed the pale of mercy—after they have gone beyond the boundary of God's protection and influence—he takes them *completely* under his control, and makes them *entirely* the creatures of his will. Oh! how is this thought calculated to aggravate the punishment of the lost! The devil has brought them to this place of woe, only to mock them in their sufferings and to make them his slaves! But beside the vast domains of hell thus thickly populated, there is still another region over which the devil exercises a powerful sway. That region is this world. He is represented as "the god of this world." Here he has set up a kingdom; and though some inroads have been made upon his dominion—though some of his subjects have been captured, and are now gallantly fighting the battles of the "captain of our salvation"—still he reigns over far the greater part of the world: and he not only reigns as a king, but is worshiped as a god; for we are assured in the scriptures, that those who worship idols, are but worshiping the devil under another name.

How great must be the power of a being reigning over so vast a region, and ruling so great a number of subjects! Hundreds of millions on earth and in hell acknowledging his authority and submitting to his will! But we remark that the vastness of the devil's power is shown

2. By his ubiquity. I do not wish to be understood as ascribing to Satan the attribute of omnipresence. This belongs to God alone. That figure of speech, however, is recognized as legitimate and proper which regards a person as doing himself what is really performed by his servants or agents. Thus the President of the United States is represented as the executive officer of the country; though the duties pertaining to this branch of the public service are

\* Rev. ix: 11.

really performed by a number of subordinates who are his agents. A king is said to win a battle or to make a treaty, when he is really hundreds of miles from the spot where these things are done. He acts by his authorized agents. Thus when we speak of the ubiquity of the devil, we are to be understood as including among his actions those things which are done by the instrumentality of the numberless agents whom he employs; and such is the rapidity with which he receives intelligence from all parts of earth and hell, that he is enabled to operate almost or quite as efficiently as if personally present. We know that our own spirits, chained to the clog of flesh which binds them to earth, can still, in one moment, soar to the remotest star; what, then, must be the speed of that spirit which is disencumbered of the body! The rapidity with which intelligence flies along the electric wires becomes the pace of a snail when compared with the swiftness with which one of these spirits darts from one end of the earth to the other. Our own observation and experience establish the truth of this assertion. Does a sinner *here* become convicted of sin, concerned on account of his situation, and anxious for salvation? The devil is ready in a moment to fill his mind with specious falsehoods. To persuade him that religion is a burdensome, gloomy affair; that it is time enough yet to become a christian, &c., and thus by every means in his power to deceive and ruin him. Is an effort made, at the same time, to propagate the gospel in *China* on the other side of the globe? He is there personally, or by his agents, to prejudice the minds of the benighted idolators against foreigners—to erect a barrier between their hearts and the word of God—to inflame their passions and to thwart the purposes of God's servants. Does a Pusey in *England*, moved by a love of pomp and display, and influenced by a desire for notoriety and the praise of men, contemplate a union with the abomination of Babylon? The devil is there to aid, abet and encourage. Is an effort made *here* by specious pretences to lure the people of God from the path of duty—to captivate them by eloquence and learning—to deceive them by plausibilities—or to intimidate them by threats? He is ready by the most insinuating arts to second the project—to introduce coldness, distrust and dissension in the church, and, "if possible, to deceive the very elect themselves."

The power of the devil is indicated,

3. By his command of the elements and the diseases of the human body. The case of Job clearly proves that he is permitted to exercise great power in this respect. In that case we find that he sent lightning from the clouds to destroy the flocks—the winds of heaven to overturn the house in which the children of Job were feasting, and to crush them under its ruins—and finally, a noisome and painful disease on the body of Job himself. Nor is the New Testament account devoid of examples of a similar character; for we are assured by our Lord, that the woman who was bowed down by a spirit of infirmity, had been bound by Satan for eighteen years.\* And even now it is probable that many of the afflictions and calamities, which visit men, are induced by the immediate agency of the devil. It is true that God "rides upon the whirlwind and directs the storm," but the devil frequently sets them in motion. The most fearful diseases, and the most appalling calamities, are instruments which Satan frequently uses in wreaking his malice on the human race. His power in this respect, as well as in all other respects, is, of course, under the control of Jehovah; still it is fearfully great.

4. Again, another, and the last evidence we shall notice of the vastness of Satan's power, is found in the influence he has over the human heart, and the facility with which he enters it. One sinful thought, one unguarded moment, affords an opportunity for the exercise of his influence which is never neglected. He enters the heart by a thousand avenues, and in a thousand forms. He sometimes presents to the mind and the senses a favorite passion or appetite, clothed in the brightest colors and wearing the most alluring form. Again he approaches, bearing in his hands treasures of gold and silver, and he, too, often entices his victim, in pursuit of these, on to sorrow, care and death. Sometimes wearing the specious appearance of plausible error, he beguiles the christian by some *ignis fatuus* he has placed before him into a quagmire of distress and pain. Indeed his exterior is frequently so fair that he appears as an angel of light, and it requires the closest scrutiny and the most prayerful examination to discover the cheat. Paul says to the Corinthians: "And no marvel; for Satan himself is

\* Luke xiii: 26.

transformed into an angel of light."\* Of Satan's power in influencing the heart and mind our daily experience and observation would convince us, had we no other evidence. The christian finds, alas! too often that he has beguiled *him* from the path of duty; that he is frequently drawing *his* thoughts into improper channels; that he has induced *him* to utter an improper expression or to commit a sinful action. And he sees around him the evidences of Satan's power and influence over the human heart and mind in the thousands he is leading to eternal destruction. But besides the evidences furnished by the word of God, and by our own experience and observation of the devil's power and influence as they are ordinarily exerted, we have accounts in the scripture of a remarkable and fearful power which he possessed in the days of Christ and his apostles. At that time he sometimes took possession (generally by his ministers,) of the mental and moral faculties of men, and entire control of their actions and words. The demoniacs appear to have been entirely subject to the will of the evil spirits who possessed them. But while demoniacal power and influence are fearfully exhibited in the cases to which allusion has just been made, there is a case of Satanic influence mentioned in the scripture of a character still more awful—I refer to the case of Judas. We are told that "after the sop, Satan ENTERED INTO HIM."† Here the prince himself comes into action. He trusts this work to none of his ministers. Before this time he had often tempted Judas, but now "*he enters into him.*" He takes complete possession of him. He becomes identified and incorporated (if I may so speak,) with his nature. With this miserable wretch the pains of hell commenced on this side the grave. These, then, are the arguments and evidences we adduce in proof of the vastness of Satan's power. We pass on to consider,

II. *The object of the devil's efforts.* His great object, in all his actions and efforts, is to oppose God and to ruin man. His office is to fight against God—to alienate the affections of men more and more from their Creator and Benefactor—to harden their hearts—to blind their minds—to steep their souls in sin and guilt—and, finally, to plunge them into hell. Driven from the high place he occupied in heaven,

\* 2 Cor. xi: 14.

† John xii: 30.

he became perfectly and pre-eminently wicked. Being thus the antipode of God in nature as well as in situation, it is not strange he should hate and oppose him. God, too, had conquered him, and consigned him to the place of punishment he inhabited, so that all the evil passions which glowed in his bosom, lashed into fury by the sufferings he endured, urged him on to hate and to oppose *Him* who had thus punished him.

Permitted by the inscrutable wisdom of God to know of the existence of the earth, and to enter it, a fine opportunity was presented for the exercise of his hellish malice. Every motive which could possibly influence such a being operated to induce a hatred of man and an effort to ruin him. Man being pure and holy, made in the image of God, the devil saw reflected in him the likeness of that Being who was the object of his implacable hatred. Here, then, was a powerful incentive to action and to effort. But in addition to this, the devil could readily perceive God's purposes of love and mercy towards the creature he had just formed. To thwart these purposes of love, to defeat or oppose these gracious intentions, was of itself a powerful inducement to energetic, earnest exertion. Thus stimulated, Satan was not slow to put into action his malicious machinations. He sought the double object of opposing God and ruining man, by tempting him to disobedience. In this effort he succeeded, alas! too well. Our first parents listened to the voice of the tempter, and fell. Encouraged by success he redoubled his efforts, and enlarged the sphere of his operations as the human family increased; and so successful were his exertions, that, in less than two thousand years from the time of the first temptation, only one family could be found fearing or serving God out of the millions that inhabited the earth. Such now had become the wickedness of men, such the influence of the devil, that God determined to sweep the earth of its inhabitants (with the exception of the family just mentioned,) at one stroke. The flood came and took them all away! The devil, however, not discouraged by the removal of his subjects from earth to hell, or by the character of the family which remained on earth, commenced his assaults upon the most pious of the little company whom God had preserved from the flood. Here again he succeeded, and Noah fell. And

fatigable in his exertions, implacable in his hatred of God and man, the devil continued his efforts with unabated ardor, from this time till the coming of Christ; seducing Israel from the path of duty, ruling the nations around her with a rod of iron, and plunging them into a vortex of vice and misery. When the Messiah made his appearance on earth, we would have supposed that here was one whom Satan *durst* not attack. We should have thought that awed by the glorious attributes and august character of this divine personage, he would have shrunk back abashed into his own appropriate hell. But we find it far otherwise. Emboldened by previous success, puffed up by the power he possessed, conscious that an antagonist was before him more formidable than any he had yet encountered, influenced by the spirit of those who said, "this is the heir, come let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours," the devil concentrates all his mighty energies, all his vast resources, on one great object—the destruction of the Saviour. And for the accomplishment of this purpose he loses no time. For no sooner does the infant Jesus make his appearance on earth, than he influences the jealous heart of Herod to make an effort for his destruction. Foiled in this attempt by the providence of God, he audaciously assails the Saviour in person, at the commencement of his ministry. Every art which hellish ingenuity could invent, is used to influence the mind or conduct of Christ. But all in vain. Now, for the first time, his temptations *entirely* fail to produce an impression. He drives his fiery darts against the adamant, and while they produce no impression on their object, the recoil sends a thrill of pain through the heart of him who directed them. Undismayed by his defeat, but learning wisdom from the conflict, Satan now directs his efforts against the Saviour through the medium of the proud, jealous Pharisees. He induces them to oppose, reject and persecute him—he takes complete possession of one of Christ's own disciples by *entering into Judas*, and by these means he brings him before the bar of Pilate, procures his condemnation, and finally leads him to the cross. Now no doubt he thought his triumph complete, and there were probably thousands of the hosts of hell collected around the accursed tree to witness the fall of their great opponent. But with what horror do they hear the cry of triumph bursting from his lips even

while hanging upon the cross! When he exclaimed, "*it is finished!*" then they perceived, for the first time, that they had unwittingly contributed to his triumph, and that in the hour of death he had achieved his greatest victory.

Though conscious that the great battle had been fought and the victory won by Christ, Satan does not discontinue his opposition; he does not resign the weapons of his warfare, but on the contrary he appears, if possible, to redouble his exertions. No sooner does Christ rise from the grave, than Satan puts a lie into the minds of the Jews by persuading them that the disciples of Jesus had stolen the body away. And from that time to this, he has continued his opposition and hatred to Christ and his cause. Commencing his operations by persecuting the christians, he found this to strengthen instead of weakening them. He discovered that through all the tortures to which they were exposed, their numbers increased, and that from the ashes of one martyr a hundred disciples sprung up to supply his place. He immediately changed his tactics, and became, all at once, the fast friend of the church. Through Constantine he consummated the adulterous union of church and State (which is but another term for a union of the church and the world,) and thus by his intimacy with the church he accomplishes what he never could have attained by his opposition. In his foul embrace piety sickened and died, and for ages he was triumphant, a dark cloud resting on the prospects of the church. At the Reformation, however, she burst forth with renewed splendor, and she has continued to increase in glory and strength ever since. Still the devil is her great enemy. He still continues to make mighty efforts to oppose God and to ruin man, and will so continue till the time of his incarceration shall arrive. Having dwelt, at some length, upon the object of Satan's efforts as developed by his operations, we will now enquire,

III. *What are the best means of foiling these efforts?* All who have sanctioned our arguments and statements thus far, will readily admit that it is important, nay, essential, that we should know how to defeat the efforts of a being thus powerful and thus malicious. Fortunately, or rather mercifully for us, ample information is furnished in the scripture on this subject. The sacred writers, aware of the power and malice of the wicked one, have not failed to sup-

ply the information necessary to oppose and defeat him. The apostle James says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you;"\* and Peter, still alluding to the wicked one, gives the same counsel in the next verse to our text, when he says, "Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."† But the sacred writers do not content themselves with such general directions on this important subject, but they give the most minute and explicit instructions as to the means and instruments which may be successfully used against our great adversary. Hear Peter in the commencement of the verse, a portion of which constitutes the text, "*Be sober, be vigilant*, because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Here sobriety and vigilance are inculcated, because the writer knew well that our passions and appetites, when not properly restrained, are powerful aids to the influence of the devil. He knew that when the rein is thrown on the neck of the lusts, when the passions are inflamed and excited, *then* the devil directs them to his own vile purposes. He knew that when the christian intermits that "eternal vigilance" which is not only the "price of liberty," but the price of heaven itself, *then* the devil enters his heart and mars his happiness and usefulness.

But the apostle Paul is still more minute and explicit in his directions on the subject. Hear his striking description of the christian warrior's armor. "Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."† Here we are furnished with the most ample directions. Here nothing is forgotten. Every exigency is here provided for, and while

\*James iv: 7.

†1 Pet. v: 8.

every kind of protective armor is supplied, offensive weapons are not omitted. The girdle of truth, the breast-plate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the sandals of the gospel, and the sword of the Spirit, are *all* here recommended to the christian. But we should remember that all these are made subordinate to that great means of protection and defence which is urged upon us in almost every sentiment of the gospel, and upon which they all depend. We mean *Christ as our help and strength*. Christ, and Christ alone, has conquered death, hell and sin. The devil, indeed, thought, as we have remarked, that his purposes were accomplished when he led Christ to the cross; but *He* knew that even then he was triumphant. *He* knew that the great battle had been fought and won, and he proclaimed the victory when he shouted in the agonies of death, "*it is finished*," and it is only by sharing in *that* victory that we might hope to conquer.

Brethren in the ministry, this fearful being is peculiarly *our* enemy. While he hates all men, he hates the faithful minister of Christ with an intensity of passion which none but a fiend can feel. Such a minister occupies a conspicuous place. He is a watchman *on* the walls of Zion, not within those walls. He is a subordinate officer under the great Captain of our salvation. He presents a shining mark for the envenomed shaft of the adversary. His reputation, his peace of mind, his usefulness, are all fortresses, any one of which, if carried by the enemy, must bring loss to the cause of Christ and gain to the adversary. How necessary, then, my brethren, that we should be ever prepared for the attacks of our wily, malicious and powerful foe! How essential that we should heed the admonition of our great commander, to "watch and pray!" How important that we should take to ourselves the whole armor of God, and having taken that armor, that we should use it constantly and effectively!

I have in this discourse, my brethren (and here I address all who love the Lord Jesus,) endeavored to open to your view the vast power and influence of the devil, and the object of his efforts, and to point out the means of foiling those efforts. A serious contemplation of this subject is calculated to produce a deep impression on our minds. Still there is no occasion for alarm or apprehension on our part. Great