

Passion For Your Name

by J. John, Author and Speaker

It really is a mystery. How could such a gifted and trusted being as Lucifer (whose very name means “light bearer” or “son of the morning”) cause the first church split and take a third of the congregation with him? In Ezekiel 28 – thought by many to refer to the fall of Lucifer – the Bible says that he was “the perfection of wisdom and beauty” (v. 12). His clothing was “adorned with every precious stone” (v. 13), and God said, “I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian” (v. 14). So what went wrong? Although we may fear and despise Satan in equal measure, there is much we can learn from the story of his fall from grace that is crucial for us as workers in the kingdom of God.

Lucifer might have been wonderful, but he let it go to his head. He began to believe his own hype, as we might say today. He was amazing, beautiful, and glorious...but he wasn't divine. Twice the Bible says that God *created* him (vv. 13,15); Lucifer may have been part of God's wondrous creation, but he was not – and never could be – God. He did not exist before all else; he didn't have the power to create incredible things – people, animals, plants, mountains, and seas – from nothing. Lucifer was subject to God's rule and authority, just like anyone else.

Infamous Downfall

It's too easy for us to dismiss Lucifer either as a cartoon figure, or an icon of evil who has been evil and twisted from the start. Yet if we do so, we create a scapegoat for all the evil in the world. He is so unlike us, we think, that he has no relevance, other than to fight or dismiss him. Yet, like so many people in front-line ministry and worship today, Lucifer had anointing and authority. He found favor with God, and was close to him. He was, by all accounts, something of a heavenly celebrity. And for those of us who like a little attention and adoration as we go about God's business within the Christian world, Lucifer is a warning to us all.



J. John

EZEKIAL 28:12-19

¹²Son of man, weep for the king of Tyre. Give him this message from the Sovereign LORD: You were the perfection of wisdom and beauty. ¹³You were in Eden, the garden of God. Your clothing was adorned with every precious stone – red carnelian, chrysolite, white moonstone, beryl, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and emerald – all beautifully crafted for you and set in the finest gold. They were given to you on the day you were created. ¹⁴I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian. You had access to the holy mountain of God and walked among the stones of fire.

¹⁵You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you. ¹⁶Your great wealth filled you with violence, and you sinned. So I banished you, O mighty guardian, from your place among the stones of fire. ¹⁷Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth and exposed you to the curious gaze of kings. ¹⁸You defiled your sanctuaries with your many sins and your dishonest trade. So I brought fire from within you, and it consumed you. I let it burn you to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. ¹⁹All who knew you are appalled at your fate. You have come to a terrible end, and you are no more.

In this passage, Ezekiel underlines time and again how lovely Lucifer was – he had “perfect beauty” he writes in Chapter 27:3, “perfected beauty” (27:4, 11) and was “perfect in beauty” (28:12). One of God’s finest works of art. But it’s not always easy being the center of attention. “You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you,” we read in 28:15. “Your great wealth filled you with violence and you sinned. So I banished you from the mountain of God. I expelled you, O mighty guardian, from your place among the stones of fire” (v. 16).

All that stardust went to Lucifer’s head. “Your heart was filled with pride,” writes Ezekiel, “because of all your beauty. You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth” (v. 17).

⁷Then there was war in heaven. Michael and the angels under his command fought the dragon and his angels. ⁸And the dragon lost the battle and was forced out of heaven. ⁹This great dragon – the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world – was thrown down to the earth with all his angels. (Revelation 12: 7-9)

It’s a stunning and shocking lesson for us all. Even in the place where you might think no sin could possibly be found – at the epicentre of God’s universe, under the shadow of his wing – Lucifer began to nurture a sense of pride and self-centredness. He took a long, hard look at himself in the mirror, and liked what he saw a little too much; with all of his beauty, wisdom, perfection, power and status, he became captivated with his own ego, and he “lifted himself up with pride.”

As the great writer C.S. Lewis once observed, “the surest way to spoil a pleasure is to start examining your satisfaction.” And we must guard against that. Take worship, for example. It can always help us to focus on God, as it captivates our consciousness and we look outward and upward instead of inward. But if we begin to take our eyes off God, perhaps by enjoying the status that comes with leading others in worship, or overseeing a home group, or disciplining needy people, then it’s easy to become introspective and suffer the paralysis of self-analysis. We can only do things in God’s strength and Spirit; but if we take our eyes off God and focus on our own gifts, we can become so self-conscious that we end up self-*obsessed*. And we then we become self-obsessed, we push God to the side and put ourselves on center stage. As we’ve seen with Lucifer, it’s the original sin against God.

Have you stopped to think about sin recently? “Sin” is a three-letter word with “I” in the middle. In eternity past, it was a sin to put yourself over and above God, and it is still a sin today, with the same serious consequences. Nothing has changed. Lucifer’s

pride perverted him. It can pervert us. And pride, as we know, comes before a fall.

As we see in Ezekiel’s account, pride takes us along the path to destruction. It generates violence (v. 16), dishonest trade (v. 18) and a terrible end (v. 20). In today’s culture, we “tolerate” so much, as if it is a virtue to do so. Yet God remains a holy God, the same yesterday, today and forever, and he will never tolerate sin. Because of Lucifer’s sin of pride, arrogance and violence, God did not allow him to remain in his privileged position near the throne of God. God cast him out.

I Want It All and I Want It Now

Lucifer’s “fall” began with dissatisfaction at his situation, at what he was called to do – what we might call his “anointing.” While there’s nothing wrong with unselfish ambition, we have to watch that we don’t become so proud of our ministry, our fame, or our talent that we seek an ever-bigger stage *for ourselves*.

Lucifer began to want more. We’re not quite sure why, but perhaps he was jealous of the humans God was about to create. His ego was bruised, because someone else was about to be created who would be even closer to God. Whatever his problem, Lucifer harbored secret ambition. He may have been holy, but he was also proud. He may have been awe-inspiring, but he also craved power. Lucifer was a servant of God, but not a child of God.

John Wesley, upon his conversion, observed that “I swapped the faith of a servant for a son.” We are children of the living God first and foremost. Who wants to be greater than his father or mother? No one who is in a right relationship with either, for that is what it’s all about: relationship. It’s only when the relationship is neglected that we think of ourselves before our family.

Making A Name For God or Ourselves?

In Revelation 22:16, we read: “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright morning star.” “Bright morning star” is the title that Lucifer wanted. Instead, he gained the name Satan, meaning “hater.”

The question is, whose name are we most keen to make known? Whose name do we want spoken from the lips of men and women? We live in an X-Factor, Pop-Idol culture, in which so many people seek fame without even expecting to work for it. It’s even easier to fall into the trap of thinking that we are really doing something useful if we become famous. But unless it’s God’s name that we’re making known, we are simply setting ourselves up as idols.

A gifted young preacher was asked by the renowned preacher Alexander Whyte to preach at his church in

Edinburgh. The young man approached the pulpit with great expectations from the crowd that had gathered to hear him. But when he walked up to the pulpit, his worst nightmare happened: his mind went blank and he couldn't think of what to say. He was, quite literally, speechless. A hush fell upon the crowd as he retreated down the steps a broken-hearted man.

The dejected young preacher asked Alexander Whyte, "What went wrong?" He replied, "If you had gone up the way you came down, you would have had more chance of getting down the way you went up."

Pride, the idolatrous worship of self, is the national religion of hell. It is so subtle that if we aren't careful, we'll even become proud of our humility. The good that's in us becomes bad. Our virtue becomes our vice.

It's like the Sunday school teacher who, having told the story of the Pharisee and the publican, said, "Children, let's bow our heads and thank God we are not like the Pharisee!" Pride must die in us or nothing of heaven can live in us. So let's root out our pride and prejudice.

Once, I was in a hospital waiting room with my son Michael, who had broken his leg. I was trying to entertain him and found a Bible-story picture book. Flicking through it, I pointed to one drawing and asked if he knew which story the picture referred to. Imagine my delight when he identified first Noah and then Moses. I could tell that two women were watching us, so, swelling with pride, I pointed to another picture and asked, "Who is this?" With a thoughtful frown, Michael replied, "I don't know who the woman is, but that man is George of the Jungle." So much for my pride!

D.L. Moody once said, "I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled."

And we really do need to be filled with Christ's love if we are to remain true to his calling. The apostle Peter wrote, "Be clothed with humility" (1 Peter 5:5), which is a fascinating phrase when we consider that our clothes are often the first thing that people see of us. How are you "clothed?" What are you wearing? Humility is knowing and acknowledging that I'm a nobody who has become a somebody in Christ.

The Bible says, "Whoever humbles themselves will be exalted." Humility is to receive praise and then to pass it on to God untouched. We cannot afford to take ourselves too seriously when we are seeking to give God the honor he so richly deserves.

On Guard

So, what are we to do? Of course, as the apostle Paul reminds us, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. None of us is perfect, and all of us are tainted by pride. But it's not good enough to take for granted God's grace and forgiveness, wonderful and redeeming though it is. If we are working for the Kingdom of Christ, we must be willing to learn, to grow, to mature on our walk with Jesus. As John the Baptist, one of the greatest messengers the church has ever known, said, "He must become more important, while I become less important." So how do we do it?

First, we must examine ourselves. We might like to pray the words of Psalm 139:23: "Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This psalm is wonderful, as it celebrates the fact that we are all uniquely created in the image of God — "I praise you," writes the psalmist — "for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." And yet, it pleads with God to search and know our hearts, and to lead us along the right path.

Second, we must guard ourselves. Further into Peter's first letter, he goes on to say, "Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour." The devil knows his time is short, so he will do anything to hinder the plan of God. He wants to kill, steal and destroy everything in our lives.

But God's plan includes the plan of salvation and the plan of protection, and in Ephesians (6:11) we read, "Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies and tricks of the Devil."

So arrogant and desperate is this fallen angel that he even tried to cause Jesus to sin against God (see Matthew 4:1-11). But the final word in that story is that the Living Word defeated all the temptations Lucifer had to throw at him. And how did he do that? With faith in this one, simple sentence: "Get out of here, Satan!" Jesus told him, "For the Scriptures say, you must worship the Lord your God; serve only Him" (Matthew 4:10). Jesus is the victor. And the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

In the book of Hebrews (2:14-15), we read, "Because God's children are human beings — made of flesh and blood — Jesus also became flesh and blood by being born in human form. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the Devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he deliver those who have lived all their lives as slaves to the fear of dying."

We must all be aware of Satan's schemes — to accuse, deceive, plant doubts, tempt us to be proud, to discourage, distract and try anything else to oppose God's purposes. How good that we have a Savior, Christ the Lord,

who intercedes for us! Jesus once prayed, “I’m not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.” As the well-known saying goes, Jesus didn’t come to take the church out of the world, but the world out of the church.

In the book of James (4: 6-7), we read, “He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires. As the Scriptures say, ‘God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble.’ So humble yourselves before God. Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.” This is not an impossible task. We are not fighting an impossible battle. And as we seek to spread God’s name far and wide across this land and across our global village, humility must be our constant companion – especially when we begin to see results.

Have you pushed God aside? Are you guilty? Then now is the time to bow down once more to Jesus and dissolve your guilt in his blood. The one before whom

we bow is the greatest being in all the world: Jesus Christ, who, the Bible says, “being found in appearance as a man, humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8).

J. John is regarded as one of the most creative Christian speakers and writers in the U.K. He has an appeal that transcends age, gender, culture and occupation. His much-loved art of storytelling helps people to discover spiritual meaning in a way that makes sense of everyday life.

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