

## **Messiah: The Dragon Slayer** by David Foster (with Roland Clarke)

Scripture tells us, *“Jesus always used stories and illustrations ... when speaking to the crowds. In fact, he never spoke to them without using such parables. This fulfilled what God had spoken through the prophet: ‘I will speak to you in parables. I will explain things hidden since the creation of the world.’”* (Matthew 13:34-35, NLT)

Notice the word “hidden”. When people asked Jesus why he always taught using parables, he explained that such stories have a way of hiding the truth from hard-hearted people. (Matthew 13:10-15) But they can positively impact teachable people, whetting their appetite and making them thirsty to learn more. Scripture tells us that a few people, after hearing Jesus, came and asked what the parables meant. (Matthew 13:10-23) Therefore, while parables hide the truth from some, they enable others to learn more.

Now that we understand the purpose of parables let us look at a modern day parable.

There was a man who decided to invest in a beautiful aquarium which became his pride and joy. Every day when he came home from work he would relax on his couch to enjoy watching the miniature world he had made. One day he came home to find his beloved fish in grave danger from a predator – a sinister snake was poised on the edge of the fish tank intent on devouring its occupants. The horrified man rushed to the rescue. The snake was now in the water so he dived head first into the fish tank! Wait a minute. That's not what happened. The man was too big! Doing this would shatter the fish tank and the fish would die. No, no, no. The man rushed across the room and plunged his arm into the fish tank. Grabbing the snake by the neck, he threw it to the ground and stamped it to death. It took a few days for him to recover from the painful fang bite in his heel but he regretted nothing. His beloved fish were saved!

This parable has all the makings of a good story: a hero, a villain, a plot with rising tension, a turning point and a resolution. And since it is a parable it contains a hidden truth. So the first question is, “Who do you think the owner represents?” ... It's not difficult to see the analogy, is it? The Bible says, God made a beautiful world, calling it “very good.” When he placed Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden they were his pride and joy. Every day he came down and walked with them. He took pleasure in talking with them. When they felt shame having disobeyed the Lord, he didn't leave them to fend for themselves.

So who is the villain? Who does the snake represent? The serpent's real aim was to ruin Adam and Eve so he represents the Devil. In Revelation Satan is described as the Dragon, the ancient serpent, the Destroyer. (Revelation 12:9; 9:11) Elsewhere Jesus called him “the murderer from the beginning.” This brings us finally to the beloved fish, “Who do they represent?” They are human beings whom God so dearly loved.

Notice that Adam and Eve were trying to hide; but no one can really hide from God. Out of love the Lord pursued them til he “found” them. Furthermore, he gave them a suitable garment of skin to cover their nakedness. Not only so, he promised to send a deliverer – the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

Before we examine more carefully what it means to “crush the head of the serpent” and explore what heroic figure would accomplish this, let us consider a question that skeptics often ask. “Is there really a Devil?” This attitude which borders on mockery is quite typical in secular societies like Canada but less common in Africa, Asia and South America.

Indeed, Muslims who are the second largest religion on earth, acknowledge there is a personal being called Shaitan who is the arch-enemy of mankind. According to the Biblical and Quranic accounts of man's fall, God Almighty pronounced a curse on the serpent, after he had deceived Adam and Eve and enticed them to sin. However, we need to look carefully at the Genesis account otherwise we may miss certain vital details which sadly are not recorded in the Qur'an.

The Bible says in Genesis 3:14-15,

Then the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all animals, domestic and wild. You will crawl on your belly, grovelling in the dust as long as you live. And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."

This verse shows God cursing the serpent, and ultimately, declaring a victory for the human race. It foretells the rise of a champion – the offspring of the woman who strikes a deadly blow to the head of the serpent. It is not difficult to see parallels between Genesis 3:15 and the fish tank parable. In fact, anyone with general knowledge of the Bible realizes there are clues in the Gospels showing a rising hostility between Satan and the Messiah, who is Jesus Christ. However, let us look first at some clues in the Old Testament that help to explain the promise of Genesis 3:15. We will start by reading two prophecies that foretell the task which God commissioned the Messiah to do.

Speaking through Isaiah, God predicted, "*You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me, I will make you a light to the Gentiles and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.*" (Isaiah 49:6) A few chapters later Isaiah described a dark scenario, "*The Lord looked and was displeased to find there was no justice. He was amazed to see that no one intervened to help the oppressed. So he himself stepped in to save them with his strong arm...*" (Isaiah 59:16) Whereas Isaiah 49 says the Messiah will bring God's **salvation** to earth Isaiah 59 describes this rescue using the metaphorical expression *the arm of the LORD*. But what is meant by this word picture? Does God have a physical arm? We need to understand this as a figure of speech, meaning that God **saves** by means of his servant, the Messiah. (Note: The Qur'an contains similar figures of speech with reference to God, e.g. the face of Allah.

This kind of imagery rings true with the fish tank parable where the owner **rescues** his beloved fish with his **arm**.

When God's Messiah was born 700 years after Isaiah he was aptly named Jesus correlating perfectly with what the prophets foretold. The name Jesus (Yeshua in Hebrew) means "The Lord is salvation." Interestingly, the story of Jesus' virgin birth and how he was given a special name by the angel is not unique to the Christian Bible. Believe it or not, certain key aspects of this remarkable nativity story are also recorded in the Qur'an!

### **Jesus vs Satan**

We've seen how the expression "arm of the Lord" signifies **saving** power. Now let us turn to Revelation at the end of the Bible and look at a vision involving a woman giving birth to a son. Interestingly, the serpent regards him as a threat and becomes enraged.

Revelation 12:7-17 (NLT) tells us,

Then there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon and his angels. And the dragon lost the battle, and he and his angels were forced out of heaven. This 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. Then I heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens, "It has come at

last – **salvation** and power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters has been thrown down to earth – the one who accuses them before our God day and night. And they have defeated him by the blood of the Lamb and by their testimony. And they did not love their lives so much that they were afraid to die. Therefore, rejoice, O heavens! And you who live in the heavens, rejoice! But terror will come on the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you in great anger, knowing that he has little time.” When the dragon realized that he had been thrown down to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. But she was given two wings like those of a great eagle so she could fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness. There she would be cared for and protected from the dragon for a time, times, and half a time. Then the dragon tried to drown the woman with a flood of water that flowed from his mouth. But the earth helped her by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that gushed out from the mouth of the dragon. And the dragon was angry at the woman and declared war against the rest of her children – all who keep God's commandments and maintain their testimony for Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

We see the final outcome of this war a few pages later where the victorious rider on a white horse, Jesus Christ, is shown to be the KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

“The Devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10, HCSB)

Let's review the key Scripture passages we've looked at so far. Genesis 3:15 predicts a champion will arise who will crush the serpent's head. The prophet Isaiah in chapters 59 & 49 helps us understand the fish tank parable by describing this rescuer as “the arm of the Lord.” Next we learned that Jesus was aptly given a name meaning, “The Lord is **salvation**.” (Matthew 1:21). Finally we read the last chapter of the war as recorded in Revelation 12:7-17.

It is natural, of course, that we want to explore a number of intriguing details in this paragraph, but because of time constraints, we need to stay focused on tracing God's promise of a **rescuer** through to its fulfillment. Notice the very same key figures from Genesis 3:15 reappear in this passage: enmity between the ancient serpent on the one hand, and, a woman and her male child. The serpent is identified more precisely as the devil, Satan and the deceiver. Not only so, the serpent is appropriately depicted as a dragon, a creature somewhat similar to a snake but much larger and more terrifying. This title is used 14 times in Revelation to describe Satan.

This brings us to John 12 the final passage we will consider. Here Jesus gives us a preview of the momentous conflict between God's Messiah and Satan which we have already seen in Revelation 12. It is important to notice that this paragraph precedes the most excruciating ordeal which concluded Christ's life on earth.

23 Jesus replied to them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

24 “I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces a large crop. 25 The one who loves his life will lose it, and the one who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me. Where I am, there My servant also will be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

27 “Now My soul is troubled. What should I say—Father, save Me from this hour? But that is why I came to this hour. 28 Father, glorify Your name!”

Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again!”

29 The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said that an angel had spoken to Him.

30 Jesus responded, “This voice came, not for Me, but for you. 31 Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out. 32 As for Me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to Myself.” 33 He said this to signify what kind of death He was about to die.

Let us take a closer look at the statement Jesus told his disciples, “Now is the judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world will be cast out.” (John 12:31) “How do you think Satan will be cast out of his worldly kingdom?” ... Do you see anything in the previous paragraph that could be a clue? ... Clearly, Jesus predicted his death. And this certainly was not the first time! “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 “I assure you: Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces a large crop.” (John 12:23-24) As if to underscore what he meant by the metaphor of a kernel falling to the ground and dying, Jesus went on to say, “As for Me, if I am lifted up from the earth I will draw all people to Myself.” The next verse makes it unmistakably clear what Jesus meant. “He said this to signify what kind of death He was about to die.” (John 12:32-33) Clearly Christ wants us to understand that his death and resurrection are the prelude to a plentiful harvest and the gateway to enter his glory.

Two things emerge from our reading of John 12. 1) Satan will be judged and cast down. 2) Jesus will die yet he won't remain in the grave. He will be gloriously raised to life.

Let us conclude by meditating on two Scriptures showing the glorious hope that is ours because Jesus arose as victor from the grave. “*Because God's children are human beings – made of flesh and blood – the Son also became flesh and blood. 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 set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.*” (Hebrews 2:14-15, NLT) Elsewhere Scripture says, Jesus came to destroy all the works of the Devil, not the least of which is death - his most terrible work. (1 John 3:8) Then we also read, “*our Savior, Christ Jesus, ... destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*” (2 Tim. 1:10, NIV)

Now let's lift our hearts in worship as we sing, “O church arise,” noting especially the chorus which highlights, “Our call to war, to love the captive soul, But to rage against the captor.”

### **Appendix: Discussion questions**

How is the dragon motif or symbol viewed in the culture where you originally came from?

[Interestingly, this sermon was preached in a Chinese church. The dragon festival is a key event celebrated across China.]

How do secular Canadians regard this motif? [noting, for example, the prevalence of horror movies and the huge popularity of occult literature, whether portrayed in subtle or blatant ways.]

Is the biblical symbolism behind this iconic dragon image a barrier or liability in terms of sharing the Gospel? How could this motif actually be a bridge to witness?

What advantages do you see in relation to using parables as Jesus did? ... [Could they possibly spark people's curiosity to think about spiritual things?]

Let's suppose a nonbeliever tells you on Monday what he/she did over the weekend. Why not reply something like this; “Yesterday I heard a really interesting story.” Pause to see how your friend replies. Maybe he will be curious. Trust Christ's indwelling Spirit to empower and guide you. Be ready to tell the fish-tank parable or share it in printed form: <https://www.answering->

[islam.org/fileadmin/authors/clarke/fishtank.pdf](http://islam.org/fileadmin/authors/clarke/fishtank.pdf)

Can you share an example from your life showing how Jesus helped you overcome temptation or perhaps an area where the Devil was getting the upper-hand?

By way of example, reflect on last week's message which reminded us how blessed we are to face the grave without fear, knowing death has lost its sting because Jesus conquered death. ...

How many Christians consider using a topic like Satan (or dragon) as a creative way of broaching a conversation that can unwrap the Gospel? Even asking such a question makes some of us uncomfortable. It may seem peculiar, strange and therefore, difficult to imagine how such a “negative” topic could be a meaningful step toward liberating people ensnared in a counterfeit religion like Islam. Muslim emphatically believe that Jesus did not die on the cross. However, they do believe the Devil is the enemy of mankind and he is accursed by Allah. Moreover, when I've shown Muslims Isaiah 49:6 most have not hesitated to admit God's Messianic servant was commissioned to bring God's salvation. Furthermore, when I've encouraged Muslim friends to ponder how God/Allah revealed the name Yeshua (Jesus) through his angel, a ray of light began to dawn in their darkened mind. Interestingly, a conservative Mufti (high-ranking Imam) acknowledged the name Jesus means, “God is salvation.” (p. 77, Islamic Names [revised edition], by Muhammad Imran Ashraf Usmani) We need to pray earnestly for opportunities to share the true light. Let us not be ashamed to share the Gospel knowing God has not given us a spirit of timidity but of power and love. (2 Timothy 1:7-8; 2 Timothy 2:23-26)

Here is a relevant article which you may find helpful:

- [How Jesus and Muhammad confronted Satan](#)

Other articles by Roland Clarke which are worth checking out are listed here:

<http://answering-islam.org/authors/clarke/>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Most commentators see Genesis 3:15 behind the serpent-woman imagery in this passage. Satan's anger against the woman is reflected in the anti-semitic and anti-Israel sentiments which are increasing in our world. Moreover, Satan's fury is increasingly being directed against “the rest of her children”, i.e., Christians who maintain their testimony of Jesus.