

A Tale of Two Princes

Once there were two princes, a greater prince and a lesser prince. The lesser prince wanted to be greater than he was, and fell into ruin and disgrace, and destroyed many with him. The greater prince was willing to be shamed and humiliated for the sake of others, and rose to the highest place, saving many with him. That, in three sentences is a summary of the history of the universe. All that has happened, all that is happening and all that will happen surrounds the lower prince who wanted to go higher, but will eventually be lowest, and the highest prince, who willing to stoop lower, who will be exalted high. Christ the greater prince, the Prince of peace, and Satan, the lesser prince, the prince of the power of the air, the prince of this world.

Our most fundamental questions are partly answered by understanding these two princes. Why are we here? Why was the universe created? Why is there evil in the world? Why would a good and powerful God have allowed evil and suffering and sin? Where is it all going? What are we supposed to do about it?

On Christmas day, better than at any other time of year, we can see how the greater prince outsmarted and destroyed the plans of the lesser prince. The Christmas story, the coming of the Son of God in humble, plain form was God brilliantly undoing the plans of the Evil One by reversing and turning Satan's plans inside out. So on the day when we celebrate and remember Christ's birth, we should do so by seeing how God lit the fuse on this day that would explode and destroy his enemies. It was at Christ's birth that we see God making a crack in Satan's wall that will quietly enlarge and bring the whole thing down.

To understand the brilliance, the grandeur, the majesty of this plan, we must go back in time, and look at the lesser prince who wanted to go higher, and then look at the greater prince who was willing to go lower.

I. The Lesser Prince Who Wanted to Go Higher

Ezekiel 28:12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. 13 You were in Eden, the garden of God; Every precious stone was your covering: The sardius, topaz, and diamond, Beryl, onyx, and jasper, Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold. The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes Was prepared for you on the day you were created.

14 "You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God; You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.

In the sections before this Scripture in Ezekiel, God has been prophesying doom on certain nations: Ammon, Moab, Philistia, and then the harbour city of Tyre in chapters 26 and 27. This was a city filled with pride at its wealth, its beauty, its renown. Behind this city's pride was a ruler who is denounced in verses 2-10. But then in verse 11, we are introduced to someone who is behind even that human ruler.

And this person is a king, but not a human king. This king is clearly an angelic being, a mighty angelic lord. The Bible often refers to angelic beings as the king of Persia, king of Greece – apparently a reference to some form of dominion they exercise. How do we know the king of Tyre is an angelic being? Just look at the descriptions.

Verse 12 - He was the seal of perfection – full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. For a creature, he was quite simply the most beautiful thing God ever made. No human can make that claim. No other angel was as beautiful. He was the height of glory when it comes to a creature.

Verse 13 says he was in Eden, the Garden of God. This seems to refer to a time before the Fall,

maybe even on the first days of creation. He was covered with every precious stone, here are listed nine stones alongside gold. And since he may well have been created before the Earth, it is quite possible that the Earth's precious stones were copies of the original precious stones found in Heaven, and adorning this creature. While we can't quite picture all these stones together, the idea is one of extraordinary beauty, dazzling wealth. The glint, the sparkle, the radiance that must have gone with him wherever he went must have been something.

You cannot help picturing the other angels admiring his beauty, staring, being as amazed by his appearance as they were by the galaxies and nebulae.

The words, "The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes" (Eze 28:13) can be translated Your mountings and settings were crafted in gold; but it may well refer to some music aspect of this creature, that he was gifted and given extraordinary ability in music.

Verse 14 describes his privileges. He was the anointed cherub. The cherubim are that order of angelic beings that surround the throne, and seem to cover, or protect the holiness of God. They seem to be the highest order of angels, because they accompanied appearances of God Himself in chapter 1. And in that order of angels, he was the anointed one – the chosen one, the highest of them all. He was on the holy mountain of God, he was walking upon the stones of fire- these seem to refer to the innermost presence of God, perhaps a closeness that the other angels do not access.

So consider all this prince had. He was as beautiful as God can make a creature. He was as wise, brilliant and intelligent as possible. He had all the wealth and splendour that could matter in heaven's economy. He was the chief of the chief angelic order, the very prince of the greatest created beings. We could say he was the crown jewel of all God made, as high as high could be in God's creation.

But what did he do?

15 You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you.

Sin was found in him. What kind of sin? Verse 17 tells us.

17 "Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;

Pride was his sin. As high as he was, he was not as high as God, he was lower than God. But this lower prince wanted to go higher. With all that beauty, wisdom, wealth, honour, privilege, rank, status, it was not enough. What did he want? Isaiah 14 picks up the story and tells us his name:

12 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! 13 For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.'

This greatest of all created beings was named Lucifer, which means light-bearer, or morning star. Verse 13 tells you what he decided in his heart. I said five "I wills". I will ascend into heaven – I will go up to the place of worship; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God – I will rule over God's angels; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north – I will sit where God sits ; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds – I will receive highest glory, I will be like the most High – in every way, I will equal and be what Yahweh God is.

Here was the moment sin was born. Into the heart of this creature came a thought, a thought which began to nag at him. If I am so beautiful, the most beautiful, if I am admired by all God's angels, if I

am already at the top of all creation, why should I not take the extra step up? Why should I not be God? Granted, I am created, but God has clearly created an equal to Himself, why should I not rule, and be served, and be worshipped?

Here Lucifer became Satan. He became the Enemy. He chose to love something in a way that God did not. He loved himself more than God. He valued himself more than God. He made an idol of himself. He wanted to take and have what was God's. And in a moment, he was corrupt. He was a thief – stealing God's glory and worship. He was a murderer – hating God's supremacy and uniqueness. He was a liar – believing his own self-deception.

He was lower than God, but he wanted to go higher. What did God say would happen to him?

15 Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, To the lowest depths of the Pit.

16 "Those who see you will gaze at you, And consider you, saying: 'Is this the man who made the earth tremble, Who shook kingdoms, 17 Who made the world as a wilderness And destroyed its cities, Who did not open the house of his prisoners?' 18 "All the kings of the nations, All of them, sleep in glory, Everyone in his own house; 19 But you are cast out of your grave Like an abominable branch, Like the garment of those who are slain, Thrust through with a sword, Who go down to the stones of the pit, Like a corpse trodden underfoot. (Isa 14:12-19)

Satan was cast out and brought down. In fact, Satan's fall takes place in three phases. His first fall was from his place as one of the cherubim guarding the holiness of God. He still had access to Heaven in general, as we read in the book of Job, where he appears with the other angels. The second stage of his fall is future and is recorded in Revelation 12, where he will be cast out from even appearing in Heaven itself during the Tribulation period on earth. His final fall will be, after having been bound for a thousand years and released for one last temptation of man after the Millennium, he will be caught and cast into the Lake of Fire.

And this text tells us that Satan will end up in the very lowest, most disgraceful, most painful part of the Lake of Fire. Even in that place, the unsaved dead will look at him and marvel, and ask, was this the cause of all evil? Was this the great prince of the power of the air? What has become of him? He is discarded, corrupting, rotten. He has lost all power, all beauty, all honour, all glory, all wisdom. All the things he coveted beyond the measure God gave him, he has lost.

Here was a prince who was lower than the Most High, but he wanted to go higher. But in the end, the prince who wanted to go higher will be brought lowest.

Even though he'd fallen, Satan still sought worship. He convinced many angels to join him. He persuaded perhaps a third of the angels to join him in rebellion against God and in Lucifer worship. And not stopping there, he targeted the crown of Earth's creatures, man. Straight into the Garden he went, and made it all about God being selfish.

“If God is so good, why doesn't He let you eat of this tree? God isn't good, He is a selfish tyrant who spoils you with nice things so you don't challenge His authority. He doesn't want you to be like Him! He wants all the glory for Himself!”

Satan wanted to not only have God's glory for himself, he wanted to shame God, strip God of glory. If God's prize creation also rebels against Him, then God either has to destroy them all, in which case it would seem God's whole creation was a failure, or He must give up His justice to pardon them all, in which case He ceases to be God. Either way, God loses glory; He stops being God. I genuinely think that Satan thought, if man falls, so will God.

How will God resolve this dilemma? Crush all with omnipotent power, and send them all to Hell, it

seems love has lost, and God began a tower He could not complete. Ignore the Fall, it seems holiness has lost, and God now has a universe shaped after Satan's heart, not God's.

That's where the second prince comes in. The story of Christmas is the story of God outdoing Satan. Instead of crushing or ignoring, God did the unthinkable. God laid aside the very thing Satan was after – His glory.

II. The Greater Prince Who Went Lower

*6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,
7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.
8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Phi 2:6-8)*

In this passage, we read of the greater prince. This greater prince did not have to say “I will be like the most High” for He was the Most High. The text tells us – 'being in the form of God'. He was always existing with the full nature and essence of God. He had the beauty. He had the glory. He had the authority. He had the worship. It belonged to Him from before Lucifer had even been created.

But amazingly, as part of a plan that the Triune God had made, the Son of God was willing to go down. And what's fascinating is that Lucifer said five “I wills” as he groped higher for more glory, but here we can trace exactly five steps down that the Lord Jesus took. Satan said “I will” five times, but Jesus said to His Father, “Thy will” five times.

Let me show them to you.

First, He said “Thy will be done that I release my privileges”

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

Whereas Satan, who was not equal with God, desired to seize that throne, and plunder God's glory, Christ who was equal with God did not have to remain in the place of worship and adoration and sovereignty. For His mission of defeating Satan, atoning for sin, saving men, and glorifying His Father, He was willing to step away from a position of unchallenged, unrivaled majesty.

Second, He said “Thy will be done that I become a slave”

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant,

Made Himself of no reputation simply means He emptied Himself. What did He empty Himself of? He emptied Himself of independent authority. He took the form of a slave. Slave's follow the will of a Master. For His mission, Christ was willing to be under His Father and dependent on the Spirit in ways that the Triune Godhead had not done before. For thirty years, he lived by permission, by commandment, by listening, and praying, and trusting, and following. He learned obedience, we read in Hebrews. Whereas Satan despised serving, and had come to think of his serving God to be beneath him, Christ embraced servanthood. In Milton's Paradise Lost, he has Satan saying, “Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven.” That was his attitude. But the Greater prince embraced it and stepped down into it.

Third, He said “Thy will be done that I add to myself a true human nature”

7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

The Lord Jesus knew that to save men, we needed a substitute. We needed a Second Adam to represent us, to take our curse, conquer our sin. But He could only do that if He was of the race of Adam. Jesus added to Himself true humanity.

“Lying at your feet is your dog. Imagine, for the moment, that your dog and every dog is in deep distress. Some of us love dogs very much. If it would help all the dogs in the world to become like men, would you be willing to become a dog? Would you put down your human nature, leave your loved ones, your job, hobbies, your art and literature and music, and choose instead of the intimate communion with your beloved, the poor substitute of looking into the beloved's face and wagging your tail, unable to smile or speak? Christ by becoming man limited the thing which to Him was the most precious thing in the world; his unhampered, unhindered communion with the Father.”
– C.S. Lewis.

I am sure that Satan despises humanity. One of the things he and his fallen angels seek to do is to get men to act like beasts, to defile and degrade and disgrace ourselves as much as possible. I believe Satan takes pleasure in this, because as a proud spirit, he hates humanity, and hates that God loves us. But in contrast to Satan's contempt for the human race, Christ embraced humanity. He embraced being an infant, nursing, growing. He embraced childhood, learning, developing. He embraced being a youth with its awkwardness, being a young man. He embraced eating and drinking, and sleeping and washing. He embraced the hot sweatiness of working in a carpenter's shop, and providing for Mary when Joseph died. He embraced growing up anonymously in a small town, listening to rabbis' sermons.

Augustine said, “The word of the Father by whom all time was created, was made flesh and born in time for us. He, without whose divine permission no day completes its course, wished to have one of those days for His human birth. In the bosom of His Father, He existed before all the cycles of the ages. Born of an earthly mother, He entered on the course of the years on that very day. The maker of man became man, that He, ruler of the stars, might be nourished at the breast, that He, the bread, might be hungry, that He, the fountain, might thirst, that He, the light, might sleep, that He, the way, might be wearied in the journey, that He, the truth, might be accused by false witnesses, that He, the judge of the living and the dead, might be brought to trial by a mortal judge, that He, justice itself, might be condemned by the unjust, that He, discipline personified, might be scourged with a whip, that He, the foundation, might be suspended on a cross, that He, courage incarnate, might be weak, and He, security itself, might be wounded, and He, life itself, might die.”

Fourth, He said, “Thy will be done that I serve to the point of death.”

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death

Did you ever think of what kind of statement God was making with the circumstances of Christ's birth? Here is God the Son. Where should a king like this be born? Who should be at the birth? Who should announce it, and who should be first to hear? We think of palaces, nobles, royal heralds, pomp and circumstance. Jesus is born, seemingly by accident, on the way to pay some taxes, in an unpleasant animal barn, placed in a feeding trough. The first people told are the lowest of the low – a bunch of anonymous shepherds. God tiptoes into our world. He is taking the place of a servant from the beginning.

If Satan had become a man, how do you think he would have arranged his birth? Where do you think he would have been born? Who would have attended the birth? Who would have been first to

hear of it?

Whereas Satan desired to exalt his throne above the stars of God, ruling over all the angels, the Lord Jesus was on His knees with a basin, scrubbing the dusty and muddy feet of a few simply, sinful and proud disciples. Jesus served by teaching, and served by healing, and served by doing great miracles. For three and a half years He was pulled in every direction as He served. And His ultimate service was being willing to serve all the way to death.

Satan knows nothing of self-sacrifice, because if he died to self, there would be nothing left. He is his own god, so he cannot die to himself without simultaneously destroying his idol. But the Lord Jesus stepped down into this.

Fifth, He said, “Thy will be done that I die a death of shame, and a death of separation.”

even the death of the cross.

Satan wanted glory, glory above the heights of the clouds. Shame, dishonour, and reproach were the last things he sought. He could never have imagined that when Jesus hung there on that instrument of dishonour, and as the Father treated Jesus as a Cursed Substitute, that right there, Satan's kingdom had been struck its death blow. Right there, in that moment of greatest disgrace for Jesus Christ, was the seed of His highest exaltation.

Satan thought God would either have to destroy all or let all go, and right there, God answering – my love and my justice remain intact and vindicated.

In doing this, He undid what Satan had done. He turned Satan's strategy on its head. Satan had said, I deserve God's glory, God's worship, God's autonomy, and so do we all. Let's reach up and seize it. Christ said. I am already God with glory, worship and autonomy. I'm willing to surrender it. I will come down, giving up my glory, to save all the glory-thieves in the world. I actually want to share my glory with humble people

Like a Judo fighter, who uses the momentum of his opponent to throw him, God brilliantly took Satan's plans to humiliate God, and went with the momentum, by humbling Himself, to being a man, willing to die, even the death of the cross, and with that, he threw his opponent down and smote his ruin.

Satan tried to shame God and disgrace God by painting God as a selfish tyrant. God answered that by accepting shame, unearned shame, the shame of the cross. God the Highest, embraced disgrace and dishonour to save His people, and glorify His name.

And in contrast to the prince who will be brought lowest, this prince is now given more glory than He began with, more honour.

*9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phi 2:9-11)*

In my mind's eye, I try to imagine the scene when the Lord returned to Heaven after the Cross. I picture the streets of Heaven lined with angelic beings. And as He walks, the angels stare, upon

their faces new expressions of bewildered, astonished admiration. How could this be? That he went so low, and has emerged victorious? I see them crumpling down on their knees, tears if angels can weep. I see them remembering Lucifer tempting them to join him in his rebellion and refusing, but perhaps still wondering. And now, seeing their Lord returned from the Cross, every question is answered, and only love and bursting praise remain.

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands,

12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

13 And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: "Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, And to the Lamb, forever and ever!" (Rev 5:11-13)

And here is where it comes into our lives. This story of the two prince is actually the beauty and the simplicity of the Gospel. People decide who they will follow by following either example. You either follow Satan's example, and seek to go higher, in defiance of God. You ignore His claims in your life, and independently, autonomously go your own way, live your own life, make your own rules, live under your own authority, please yourself, honour yourself and love yourself with all your heart, all your soul, all your might. But like Satan, that is the road to the shame, the disgrace, the humiliation of Hell and separation from God.

Your other choice is to be like Christ. You give up your claim to your own glory, your own rights, your own authority. You come to the Triune Creator-God and you acknowledge you have lived in pride, and turn away from self-seeking, self-loving, self-worship. You empty yourself, as it were. You bow the knee as a slave to Jesus Christ, who died for your sins, and rose to give you a new life. You trust Him and ask Him to be your Saviour and Lord, and make you new. And God will do that. He will give you a new heart, where the old, fallen tyrant of self no longer rules, and where you now grow to live under God's authority, to please God, to honour God, and to love Him with all your heart, soul and might. And that is the grace-given road to the honour, glory and splendour of Heaven.

Once there was a lesser prince who wanted to go higher, but fell, and took all those with him, who also desired their own glory.

Once there was, and had always been a greater prince, who was willing to come lower, rose again, and took all those with Him who humbled themselves and loved His glory.