

# “Dragon’s Lair”

*As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.  
So Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly” (John 13:27).  
Psalm 51 <sup>1</sup>*

We live in an age that is fascinated with dragons. The HCC teams and the Glenelg Country School teams are called *The Dragons*. We have movies for kids like *Pete’s Dragon*. Tolkien’s book *The Hobbit*, the prequel to *The Lord of the Rings*, is mostly about a dragon. My friend, Bob Hughes, has written a trilogy of novels about dragons that I believe is about to be republished.

I use something called *Dragon Software* to dictate things to my computer. Space X has named its space vehicle the *Dragon*. And I’ve recently read that the blood of the only real dragon in the physical world—the Komodo Dragon—may provide clues to a powerful new class of antibiotics.

There is, of course, another dragon—a real dragon—that preceded all of these and who is still very, very much alive. The Bible calls him “**the great dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray**” (Revelation 12:9). And although this dragon primarily inhabits the spiritual world, he is quite active in our physical world as well.

For the next few minutes, I’d like to think with you for a little bit about how this dragon entices us into his lair, about what it’s like to be his captive, and about how we break free from him.

Now in the first place, in order to get anyone to fall for a trap, the trap generally has to be camouflaged so that it doesn’t look like a trap. Or if it does look somewhat like a trap, potential victims have to be persuaded that they can get very close to it without being caught. Abraham’s nephew, Lot, is a good example of how that works.

You may remember that way back in Genesis, when God was beginning to build the nation that would become Israel, Abraham’s nephew, Lot, chose to move his family from Haran to Canaan with Abraham’s family. You may also remember that as time went by, their two clans became so large that the land was unable to support their combined flocks and herds, and Abraham suggested to Lot that they not live so close together.

Abraham invited Lot to choose what part of the land he’d prefer, after which Abraham would move to a different area. We’re told that “*Lot took a long look at the fertile plains of the Jordan Valley in the direction of Zoar. The whole area was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the LORD or the beautiful land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Valley to the east of them. He went there with his flocks and servants and parted company with his uncle [Abraham].*

“*So [Abraham] settled in the land of Canaan, and **Lot moved his tents to a place near Sodom** and settled among the cities of the plain. But the people of this area were extremely wicked and constantly sinned against the LORD” (Genesis 13:10-13).*

We’re not told whether Lot and Abraham knew that the cities of the plain were wicked before Lot moved there, but “moving near Sodom” is something we all do, in our own way. Time after time, we decide to see how close we can get to something questionable—or even something

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on April 13, 2017 – Maundy Thursday.

patently evil—without “crossing the line.” And, like Lot, we pretty soon find ourselves living, not “near Sodom,” but “living in Sodom” (Genesis 14:12).

And I expect that you know the story of what happened after that. God eventually destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, and in that destruction Lot lost all of his property, together with his wife. After that, his two daughters got him drunk and became pregnant by him, and years later, Lot’s incestuous offspring became the enemies of God’s chosen people, those descended from Abraham (Genesis 19:36-38).

So here’s the deal. **Lot never intended to lose his wife and pretty much everything else he valued in life. He didn’t intend to do that, but neither did he intend *not* to do it.** Lot tried to get as close to the fire as he could, thinking he could avoid being burned. Don’t raise your hand, but I expect that you know what I’m talking about.

A thousand years later, King David thought the same thing about the beautiful woman bathing on her rooftop in the city below. Perhaps he couldn’t have helped the first look, but he could certainly have helped the second . . . though he didn’t choose to do that. Add another thousand years, and “*as soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. So Jesus told him, ‘What you are about to do, do quickly’*” (John 13:27).

And so, whether Lot, or David, Judas, or you, or me, each of us is enticed in turn into the Dragon’s Lair and the trap is sprung: GOTCHA!

Because he was a poet, David was able to describe quite vividly what GOTCHA is like, and he did that in what we know as Psalm 51. You have this on an insert in your worship order. GOTCHA has ten terrible effects and one potentially good effect:

**1. Sin Soils the Soul**

*<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. <sup>2</sup> Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.*

**2. Sin Saturates the Mind**

*<sup>3</sup> For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night.*

**3. Sin Stings the Conscience**

*<sup>4</sup> Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.*

**4. Sin Saddens the Heart**

*<sup>8</sup> Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me— now let me rejoice.*

**5. Sin Sickens the Body**

*<sup>8</sup> Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me— now let me rejoice.*

**6. Sin Sours the Spirit**

*<sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.*

**7. Sin Separates Us from God**

*<sup>11</sup> Do not banish me from your presence, and don’t take your Holy Spirit from me.*

**8. Sin Softens the Will**

*<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.*

### 9. Sin Stains the Hands

<sup>14</sup> *Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness.*

### 10. Sin Seals the Lips

<sup>15</sup> *Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you.*

### 11. Sin Sends Us to God

<sup>17</sup> *The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.*

This last effect is the key to escaping the Dragon's Lair. In order to break free, you and I, like the Prodigal son, must "come to our senses" and return to our Father with repentant hearts. The Prodigal said to himself, "*I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant'*"

*So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him"* (Luke 15:18-20).

Once you and I come to our senses and realize that we are captives in the Dragon's Lair, one way that we can return to our Father as the Prodigal did is to pray a prayer similar to the one on the Psalm 51 handout:

I confess to you, dear God, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially \_\_\_\_\_.  
For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry. I beg you to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly ask your forgiveness.<sup>2</sup>

And, just like the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son, so, too, our Father in Heaven will welcome us home: "*Come now, let's settle this,*" says the LORD. "*Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool"* (Isaiah 1:18).

To use tonight's metaphor, God's forgiveness will "undragon" us. But while God will certainly keep the promise to set us free from the Dragon's Lair, that process may be both more painful and more wonderful than we expect. After the story of the Prodigal Son, my favorite story about God's forgiveness—**God's Undragoning**—is this one from Book Three of the *Chronicles of Narnia*—*The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*.<sup>3</sup>

The situation is that a boy named Eustace has been enticed into a dragon's lair, and in that lair, he has been turned into a dragon himself. Aslan, the Great Lion who is the Christ Figure in these stories, eventually releases Eustace from this curse through a most unexpected process. We join the story as Eustace is telling his friend Edmund about what happened . . . .

They went to the rocks and sat down looking out across the bay while the sky got paler and paler and the stars disappeared except for one very bright one low down and near the horizon.

<sup>2</sup> From *The Book of Common Prayer*.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, Book 3 in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (NY: Macmillan, 1952), pp. 87-91.

"I won't tell you how I became a—a dragon till I can tell the others and get it all over," said Eustace. "By the way, I didn't even know it was a dragon till I heard you all using the word when I turned up here the other morning. I want to tell you how I stopped being one."

"Fire ahead," said Edmund.

"Well, last night I was more miserable than ever. And that beastly arm-ring was hurting like anything—."

"Is that all right now?"

Eustace laughed—a different laugh from any Edmund had heard him give before—and slipped the bracelet easily off his arm. "There it is," he said, "and anyone who likes can have it as far as I'm concerned. Well, as I say, I was lying awake and wondering what on earth would become of me. And then—but, mind you, it may have been all a dream. I don't know."

"Go on," said Edmund, with considerable patience.

"Well, anyway, I looked up and saw the very last thing I expected: a huge lion coming slowly towards me. And one queer thing was that there was no moon last night, but there was moonlight where the lion was. So it came nearer and nearer. I was terribly afraid of it. You may think that, being a dragon, I could have knocked any lion out easily enough. But it wasn't that kind of fear. I wasn't afraid of it eating me, I was just afraid of *it*—if you can understand. Well, it came closer up to me and looked straight into my eyes. And I shut my eyes tight. But that wasn't any good because it told me to follow it."

"You mean it spoke?"

"I don't know. Now that you mention it, I don't think it did. But it told me all the same. And I knew I'd have to do what it told me, so I got up and followed it. And it led me a long way into the mountains. And there was always this moonlight over and round the lion wherever we went. So at last we came to the top of a mountain I'd never seen before and on the top of this mountain there was a garden—trees and fruit and everything. In the middle of it there was a well.

"I knew it was a well because you could see the water bubbling up from the bottom of it: but it was a lot bigger than most wells—like a very big, round bath with marble steps going down into it. The water was as clear as anything and I thought if I could get in there and bathe it would ease the pain in my leg. But the lion told me I must undress first. Mind you, I don't know if he said any words out loud or not.

"I was just going to say that I couldn't undress because I hadn't any clothes on when I suddenly thought that dragons are snaky sorts of things and snakes can cast their skins. Oh, of course, thought I, that's what the lion means. So I started scratching myself and my scales began coming off all over the place. And then I scratched a little deeper and, instead of just scales coming off here and there, my whole skin started peeling off beautifully, like it does after an illness, or as if I was a banana. In a minute or two I just stepped out of it. I could see it lying there beside me, looking rather nasty. It was a most lovely feeling. So I started to go down into the well for my bathe.

"But just as I was going to put my foot into the water I looked down and saw that it was all hard and rough and wrinkled and scaly just as it had been before. Oh, that's all right, said I, it only means I had another smaller suit on underneath the first one, and I'll have to get out of it too. So I scratched and tore again and this under skin peeled off beautifully and out I stepped and left it lying beside the other one and went down to the well for my bathe.

"Well, exactly the same thing happened again. And I thought to myself, oh dear, how ever many skins have I got to take off? For I was longing to bathe my leg. So I scratched away for the third time

and got off a third skin, just like the two others, and stepped out of it. But as soon as I looked at myself in the water I knew it had been no good.

"Then the lion said—but I don't know if it spoke—'You will have to let me undress you.' I was afraid of his claws, I can tell you, but I was pretty nearly desperate now. So I just lay flat down on my back to let him do it.

"The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I've ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off. You know—if you've ever picked the scab of a sore place. It hurts like billy-oh but it *is* such fun to see it coming away."

"I know exactly what you mean," said Edmund.

"Well, he peeled the beastly stuff right off—just as I thought I'd done it myself the other three times, only they hadn't hurt—and there it was lying on the grass: only ever so much thicker, and darker, and more knobbly looking than the others had been. And there was I as smooth and soft as a peeled switch and smaller than I had been. Then he caught hold of me—I didn't like that much for I was very tender underneath now that I'd no skin on—and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but only for a moment. After that it became perfectly delicious and as soon as I started swimming and splashing I found that all the pain had gone from my arm. And then I saw why. I'd turned into a boy again. You'd think me simply phony if I told you how I felt about my own arms. I know they've no muscle and are pretty moldy compared with Caspian's, but I was so glad to see them.

"After a bit the lion took me out and dressed me—."

"Dressed you. With his paws?"

"Well, I don't exactly remember that bit. But he did somehow or other: in new clothes—the same I've got on now, as a matter of fact. And then suddenly I was back here. Which is what makes me think it must have been a dream."

"No. It wasn't a dream," said Edmund.

"Why not?"

"Well, there are the clothes, for one thing. And you have been—well, un-dragoned, for another."

"What do you think it was, then?" asked Eustace.

"**I think you've seen Aslan,**" said Edmund.

It is still true, as we sit here tonight, my friends, that "*the great dragon, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, [is leading] the whole world astray.*" And once we have been caught in his lair, we sadly discover that the false promises of Sin soil the soil, saturate the mind, sting the conscience, sadden the heart, sicken the body, sour the spirit, separate us from God, soften the will, stain the hands, and seal the lips. But by God's mercy, Satan's GOTCHA! can also send us back to our Father with a broken and repentant heart.

As we continue our journey toward the Cross this Lenten season, wouldn't you like for your soul to be clean, for your mind to be unfettered, for your conscience to be clear, for your body to be strengthened, for your spirit to be sweetened, for your heart to be gladdened, and for your lips to be set free? Is there a sin that God brings to your mind just now that stands between you and such joy?

The Bible says, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*" (1 John 1:9). Will you come home to God's Love?

# Psalm 51

## 1. Sin Soils the Soul

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

## 2. Sin Saturates the Mind

<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

## 3. Sin Stings the Conscience

<sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

## 4. Sin Saddens the Heart

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

## 5. Sin Sickens the Body

<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

## 6. Sin Sours the Spirit

<sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

## 7. Sin Separates Us from God

<sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

## 8. Sin Softens the Will

<sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

## 9. Sin Stains the Hands

<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.

## 10. Sin Seals the Lips

<sup>15</sup> Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.

## 11. Sin Sends Us to God

<sup>17</sup> My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.



## **Confession of Sin**

I confess to you, dear God, that I have sinned by my own fault in thought, word, and deed, in things done and left undone; especially \_\_\_\_\_.

For these and all other sins which I cannot now remember, I am truly sorry.

I beg you to have mercy on me. I firmly intend amendment of life, and I humbly ask your forgiveness.

from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

## **Psalm 51**

*<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.*

*<sup>3</sup> For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. <sup>4</sup> Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.*

*<sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. <sup>6</sup> Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.*

*<sup>7</sup> Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

*<sup>8</sup> Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. <sup>9</sup> Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. <sup>13</sup> Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you.*

*<sup>14</sup> Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. <sup>15</sup> Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise.*

*<sup>16</sup> You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. <sup>17</sup> My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.*

## **Assurance of Pardon**

### **1 John 1:8-9**

*<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

*<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*

**THANKS BE TO GOD!**