

THE TRUTH ABOUT THE DEVIL

© By Mark Beard

Text: Revelation 12:7-9

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Paul Harvey has become famous for revealing little known facts about famous people. It has proved to be as educational as it is entertaining. The following story is one such example of how little known facts can shed a whole new light on an individual's life.

■ His name was Charles E. Boles.

You know him; history remembers him, as the California outlaw who terrorized Wells Fargo for more than 7 years.

By the second year of his infamous career, Black Bart was among the most frequently repeated names in the California newspapers. Feature writers glorified his daring, for Black Bart.... worked alone!

When he was least expected, Bart would appear in the middle of a stagecoach trail, brandishing a double-barrel, twelve-gauge shotgun, his face concealed beneath a hood.

And though Ban was indeed a menacing figure, he was an amateur poet too! He usually left his incredulous victims with a few lines of original verse.

From the Sierra Nevada foothills to the Sonoma Coast of California was outlaw territory. But not even an outlaw could pass that way without thinking twice.... about Black Bart.

During Bart's reign of terror, between ~875 and 1883, he is credited with 29 stagecoach robberies. And so bold were those 29 robberies that the lone, hooded bandit became the most celebrated desperado of his time.

His penchant for stagecoaches contracted by Wells Fargo led many to believe that Bart had a vendetta against the company. While this might have been true, the romanticized fiction of Black Bart as a gallant hero fighting single-handedly against a giant corporation became so popular that even some Wells Fargo officials started believing it.

As it turns out, the facts surrounding Black Bart's criminal career are more incongruous than the fantasies.

For example, Bart was finally caught not by a gunslinging sheriff or by an armed posse.... but by a detective!

During Bart's last robbery, he was wounded, got away.

Afterward, while they were combing the hills for a trace of him, a bloodstained handkerchief was discovered. On this handkerchief, in one corner....

F.X.O.7.

A laundry mark!

That's right, the telltale laundry mark on a piece of fine linen led to the arrest and conviction of California's most feared outlaw.

San Francisco supersleuth Harry Morse canvassed a hundred laundries and laundry agencies in that city before making the right connection. When he did.... when Detective Morse found the right establishment, who was there to pick up his laundry? Black Bart

Bart went into custody peaceably.

He returned the loot from his last heist, pleaded guilty to the robbery, received a light sentence. After four years serving as druggist for the prison doctor at San Quentin, he was back on the street. As far as anyone knows, Charles E. Boles.... the original Black Bart... never committed another crime.

If you're wondering how the hooded, shotgun-wielding tyrant of the stagecoach trails got off with a virtual reprimand, you should know what the authorities discovered about Black Bart.... when the hood came off.

Instead of a hard-riding equestrian, they found a man who was so frightened of horses, he traveled to and from all his robberies on foot.

Instead of a bloodthirsty young desperado from Death Valley, they found an aging gentleman from Decatur, Illinois....who never once in all his career as a bad man fired a shot.... because he never once.... loaded his gun! (Harvey, 117-19)

It would seem that the devil is much like Black Bart -- fearsome until the hood comes off. Needlessly feared by many who, if they had known, had the power to stop him all along. The truth finally came Out about Black Bart and it's time the truth came out about the devil. Look with me at several truths from God's word as we "pull the hood off" this masquerader.

I. THE DEVIL IS NOT ALL KNOWING.

A. He cannot read our thoughts; he can only anticipate or predict our actions.

B. All he knows about you is that which you reveal to him or his allies.

C. Only God is *omniscient* or all knowing.

■ Jeremiah said, "Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5)

II. THE DEVIL IS NOT PRESENT EVERYWHERE AT ONCE.

A. He is limited by both time and space, as are the angels.

B. He makes his presence known through fallen angels, demons and evil men.

He influences your thoughts through drawing your attention to things that he knows will make the human mind doubt the word of God.

■ Max Lucado writes, "He'll pester you. He'll irritate you. He'll criticize your judgment. He'll kick the stool out from under you and refuse to help you up. He'll tell you not to believe in the invisible yet offer no answer for the inadequacy of the visible. He's a mealy-mouthed, two-faced liar who deals from the bottom of the deck. His aim is not to convince you but to confuse you. He doesn't offer solutions, he only raises questions." (52)

He does all this through the world system he has established and by those whom he controls.

C. Only God can be *omnipresent* or everywhere at one time.

■ Psalms 139:7-12, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me."

III. THE DEVIL IS NOT ALL-POWERFUL.

A. He has no power over a child of God -- none at all!

He can only intimidate and aggravate. Jesus took away his power child of God.

■ Colossians 2:15 assures us that Jesus, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

The problem is not that we need the victory over the devil in every instance; the problem is that sometimes we just need victory over self.

■ A little girl was once in a very bad mood. She took her frustration out on her younger brother, at first just teasing him, but eventually, punching him, pulling his hair, and kicking him in the shins. The boy could take it all -- even dish back a few blows until the kicking began. That hurt! And he went crying to his mother, complaining about what his sister had done.

The mother came to the little girl and said, "Mary, why have you let Satan put it into your heart to pull your brother's hair and kick his shins?"

The little girl thought it over for a moment and then answered, "Well, Mother, maybe Satan did put it into my heart to pull Tommy's hair.... but kicking his shins was my own idea." (GLDB, 83)

B. Satan's strength is not, has not, and never will be greater than God's power.

■ John 8:42-44 shows us that Satan's power is in deception.

"Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.'"

C. Only God is *omnipotent* or all-powerful.

■ Psalms 62:11, "God has spoken once, Twice I have heard this; That power belongs to God."

■ Jesus said in Matthew 28:18, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."

CONCLUSION

■ Jack R. Taylor writes, "A foe needlessly feared, usually has a decisive advantage. Our foe is already defeated. He knows it. I know he knows it. He knows I know he knows it. He is a foe who has fallen, but is not finally done away with. This is the economy of God. The victory is ours, because the Victor has come." (16)

It is clear that unscriptural ideas and teachings have inflated satan's reputation. While he is to be respected as a serious opponent he is not to be feared as an all-conquering foe. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we are the triumphant ones. We are overcomers, victorious, and free of his intimidation and bondage.

Therefore, it is our duty as Christians to take responsibility for our own actions. Maturity in Christ involves not only walking in the power of God, but also accepting the responsibility for our own acts of sin and disobedience. Through the power of God we can live righteously and holy in this present day. We can live free of the fear and intimidation that once hounded us before conversion. We can live like Christ and the devil cannot stop us!

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