

Spiritual Attack pt 2 | Threats to Wholeness series

Read Job 1:6-11 or 1:6-22

PRAYER

When a fleet of ships pulled into the Sicilian port of Messina in October 1347

... there was a horrible surprise for those who gathered to meet them

- Most of the sailors aboard the ships were dead
 - Those still alive were covered in mysterious black boils
- The Sicilian authorities ordered the fleet of “death ships” out of the harbor, but it was too late:
 - Over the next five years, this plague known as the Black Death swept across Europe killing 20 million people – almost one-third of the continent’s population.

But what caused it?

- It seemed that even touching a sick person’s clothes could give you the disease
 - People who were perfectly healthy when they went to bed at night could be dead by morning.
- Medicine wasn’t so advanced back in the 14th century

Some doctors refused to go anywhere near patients

... believing that just looking at a sick person could spread the disease

- Others relied on crude techniques like bloodletting and boil-lancing
 - ... and superstitious practices like burning aromatic herbs or bathing in vinegar.
- Priests refused to administer last rites
 - Shopkeepers closed stores
 - ◆ Many fled the cities for the countryside, but even there they could not escape the disease

The Black Death had run its course by the 1350 ...

... but reappeared in succeeding generations

- It took three centuries for the world population to return to what it had been before the Black Death

Can you imagine living through that...

... fearing for your life

- having absolutely no idea what was causing this plague that you could contract at any moment?

How much horror, suspicion and death...

... could've been avoided if only they knew ... that it was carried by fleas and rats

If I were alive in that day

... I would've wanted someone to give me clarity

- The problem is rats
- Here's how you can get rid of them and the problem will go away

When it comes to the broader problem of evil ...

... in the world today

... many people still have no real idea about what the nature of evil is, where it comes from, or what to do about it

- While our lives aren't in danger quite as they were during the Black Plague
... we are all affected by an enemy we can't see or locate - evil
- Evil or misfortune could hit you tomorrow, or this afternoon, without warning

But God doesn't want us to be ignorant about it

- He wants us to have an abundant life
 - Not a life where we are constantly afraid and anxious and wondering when the next misfortune will hit us
- And so accordingly, some significant parts of the Bible are devoted to explaining it to us
... like the entire book of Job for example

I was reading Job this week...

... thinking how countless generations of people have asked why righteous people suffer

... and wondering how many people who ask that question have read the book of Job?

Last week we started looking at the nature of evil in the Bible

... as one of the 'threats to wholeness' in our current series

- Here's what we discovered - firstly from Luke chapter 4

Insights from Luke 4 - Temptations of Christ

- There is a personal Devil
- Temptation is one of his tools
- His work is subtle, and often appears reasonable
- Appropriate Scripture stops him
- He attacks people at significant or vulnerable moments

THREATS TO
WHOLENESS



What have been the significant or vulnerable moments in your life so far?

- Times when you could make a real difference
 - Have you felt spiritually attacked or oppressed at some of those times?
- [Alpha Course? / Just about to start a new job? / Finally got time with your family?]

Then we looked at five ways in which evil operates:

Spiritual attack can come through:

Accusation	<i>'the one who accuses them before our God day and night.'</i> - Rev 12:10
Temptation	<i>"I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you"</i> - 1 Thess 3:5
Division	<i>"a divided household falls."</i> - Lk 11:17
Disempowerment	<i>"we're not fighting against flesh-and-blood, but against evil rulers & authorities ... against mighty powers in this dark world"</i> - Eph 6:12
Deception	<i>"Satan disguises himself as an angel of light."</i> - 2 Cor 11:14

"Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." - 1 Pet 5:8-9

THREATS TO
WHOLENESS



In looking at the story of Job...

... I realised that all five of these factors are in play

In Job 1:6, Satan is accusing Job before God...

... of being not the great man that God makes him out to be

In Job 2:8, Job's wife tempts him to give up his faith:

'Just curse God and die'

And doing that would also cause division

- Separating Job from God; and he had already lost his family

Disempowerment is the theme of the whole story

... as one thing after another is taken off him

And Satan uses Job's friends...

... to deceive him into thinking this misfortune was due to his own sin, or that of his family

But the really interesting observation from Job on the subject of evil comes in these verses:

"But reach out and take away everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face!" "All right, you may test him," the Lord said to Satan. "Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don't harm him physically." So Satan left the Lord's presence." - Job 1:11-12

Can you see what's so significant about that?

- It's so obvious we can miss it
- ***Satan has to ask!***
- Good & evil are not equal forces
 - Evil is only allowed to operate within the limits God sets

And we saw that last week also...

... in the book of Jude:

"And I remind you of the angels who did not stay within the limits of authority God gave them but left the place where they belonged. God has kept them securely chained in prisons of darkness, waiting for the great day of judgment." - Jude 1:6

... where it talks about limits of authority given to the powers of evil

Evil doesn't win in the end

... and you don't have to be fearful that it might win in you

We're told to 'stand firm against all the strategies of the Devil' (Eph 6:11)

- How exactly should we do that?
 - Does the Bible have anything more specific?
 - ◆ Yes it does

The plan for today is to look at how those 5 kinds of spiritual attack can be countered

- So here we go...

1. How do we guard against Accusation?

- That voice in our head that says: 'You're useless'; 'God's disappointed with you', and all the rest

This is so foundational...

... because if you feel useless and disconnected from God

... then you'll feel unable to do anything about any of these forms of spiritual attack

- And no doubt that is exactly what the Devil would want

There are three profoundly helpful Scriptures that bear on this:

2 Corinthians 10:5b (NIV)

"We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

- Just because we're hearing that negative voice in our heads
 - ... doesn't mean we have to own it
- Because where does it come from?
 - Definitely not from God
- Are we going to allow that negative voice, that's not from God to determine how we feel?

When you take those stupid thoughts captive, they lose their power over you

- What does it mean to take a thought captive?
 - It's to recognise it for what it is, and for where it comes from
 - And in doing that we disarm it

[Every Sunday morning in my first year of my ministry / 'Your sermon is rubbish', 'You have no right to get up in front of people', 'You're sinful' / 'Those are just the crazy thoughts I get on a Sunday morning / They diminished and disappeared]

Not only does Scripture teach us to negate...

... those crazy negative thoughts

- It tells us to replace them with truth

Eph 6:14

'Put on the belt of truth'

John 8:32

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

The problem however...

... is that so often we don't realise that underneath our depressed or angry or anxious feelings are beliefs that are untrue

- That's where counselling can make a huge difference

2. How do we guard against Temptation?

All over the media at the moment is Hugh Hefner

... the inventor of Playboy magazine

... who passed away last week

Hefner described himself as a revolutionary and a liberator of women

- Revolutionary in the sense that Playboy brought something that was taboo and made it available to everyone
- It's fascinating to see how he is written about in secular media
 - Some articles are positive, considering him an 'icon'; and where there is critique it often feels like they're missing the obvious

How does a magazine ...

... explicitly created for males to oggle at bring any liberation to women?

- It objectifies women, and Hefner himself described women as objects

This isn't liberation...

... it's slavery to the power of evil

And here's what this great revolution of Hefner's brought

- I worked with a guy for two years...
 - ... who was addicted to internet porn
- He hated himself for it and it affected his marriage relationship

I took him through the Valiant Man course

... then carried on meeting for accountability as often as possible

- He tried so hard and made real progress at times
 - Yet just when he seemed to be clear it would pull him back again
 - He found it agonising and hopeless

How does that kind of addiction come about?

- I don't know exactly
- But he did tell me it all started when as a young teenager he found that his father - a devoted Christian - had a hidden stash of Playboy magazines
 - His dad had been his hero

The legacy of the Playboy magazine 'revolution'

... is the sexual muck that's spread from one end of the internet to the other

... where males of any age can view objectified women any time on any device without even needing to buy a magazine

Is all of this Hugh Hefner's fault?

- No, he's just an example of someone who's allowed himself to come under the authority of evil
 - ... like many others

What does the Bible offer us in the face of temptation?

'Do not give the devil a foothold.' - Eph 4:27

- The clue here is to recognise temptation early on and pull out of it
- We have a choice to open the door or not

God is not surprised when we get tempted...

... nor does he struggle understand how it feels, or think that's easy to avoid temptation:

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." - Heb 2:18

And once again the key to getting out of those sin-confess cycles

... is finding the truth

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." - John 8:32

- There's a lie behind every temptation
 - *That it will fill a need in you*
 - *That it is harmless*
 - *That it will make you feel better*
- None of those are actually true

- Instead, spend time thinking about a healthy thing that really will make you feel better

3. How do we guard against division?

Last week we said Ephesians is a book about...

... how to be a special kind of church community

- But most spiritual warfare teaching overlooks that and applies it individualistically
- To press the point even further...

Re - The Armour of God passage (Ephesians 6)

'An English translation can not easily show it, but the imperatives throughout this section are plural.

We usually interpret them as if they were addressed to individuals

... without denying their relevance for individuals, we should understand them as Paul's instructions for the church collectively to put on God's armour and stand as one person.'

- NIVAC Commentary on Ephesians, p339

So... Put the armour of God on your church!

One of the Devil's five big tools...

... is to divide us

- To tear apart our churches, our families and our marriages

So here's a great Lifegroup question for this week:

- What are the biggest threats to harmony in the church?
- What are the biggest threats to harmony in our families and marriages?

Few things are more radical in an individualistic age...

... than aligning yourself with Jesus' final prayer:

"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one" - John 17:20-21

4. How do we guard against disempowerment?

How did Jesus deal with the spiritual powers and authorities...

... during his time on earth?

"In this way, he disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities. He shamed them publicly by his victory over them on the cross." - Col 2:15

- Jesus disarmed them through love - at the cross
- That's the first strategy - to love the people who disempowered you

A second one is to refocus on to what matters most:

Job said,

“I came naked from my mother’s womb,
and I will be naked when I leave.

The Lord gave me what I had,
and the Lord has taken it away.

Praise the name of the Lord!” - Job 1:21

- That’s recognising God’s goodness even when you are waiting to see the results of it
 - Not easy to do, but important

Then comes Acts 10:38

And you know that God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. Then Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. - Acts 10:38

- Power that matters, comes from Jesus
- Like Jesus we should look to lift people out of oppression

There are major international companies...

... who have employed people basically as slaves to sell goods to you at incredibly cheap rates

- When we buy those goods, because we love the cheap price, and we don’t even ask a question about it
 - ... we are helping that evil system to flourish
- Instead, join with Jesus to bring hope to those oppressed by the Devil, by being conscientious about what you buy

[Healing of memories - for when a past event disempowers us. A stronghold over your life]

5. How do we guard against Deception?

The first most important thing regarding deception, is to expect it:

“Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons.” - 1 Tim 4:1

- I discovered recently that in South Korea there are around 500 self proclaimed Messiahs
 - That’s crazy and illogical, but not unexpected - if we know 1 Tim 4:1
- So Christians in South Korea are a little more wary than we are in other parts of the world

The second thing is to recognise that there are choices...

... we can make even after we are deceived

“Then Peter said, “Ananias, why have you let Satan fill your heart? You lied to the Holy Spirit, and you kept some of the money for yourself.” - Acts 5:3

- The Devil only works through us if we let him

And as per last week, we are called to join with Jesus in exposing evil

“Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.” - Eph 5:11

A previous SCJ member that I’ve got to know...

... said that in the first block of teaching in his time at SCJ, everything was great

- Except for a couple of tiny little things that were red flags
- But because they were so tiny & everything else was so good
... he let it go

He regrets that, and as a result he got drawn further in

- When you see those little red flags of deception
 - It’s time to make a stand
 - It’s time to expose the evil before it draws you and others in

[Counterfeit money - it comes down to how well you know the original. Study the original very very well, & you won’t be deceived. So it is with Scripture.]

Every year or two the phone goes at the church office...

... and someone will want a pastor to come and pray through their house

... because of some kind of disturbing thing that’s been happening there

... or a presence of evil

... or an unusual run of misfortune

We used to laugh about it ...

... and call it ghostbusting as a couple of us pastors would get in the car and go round to the house

- But the seriousness would really hit you when you met the family and heard what had been happening
 - And see the fear in their eyes
 - A couple of times I got a bit freaked out myself

Sometimes in the car on the way I’d think...

- But who am I to go and cast out evil?
 - I’m just Steve
 - I’m sinful and weak

- And I'm nowhere near as devoted, or as spiritual or as honourable as many other pastors I know

The great news is...

... I don't have to be

... and neither do you

Your ability to battle the Devil and his work...

... has nothing to do with your strength, or your goodness or even your feeling of closeness to God

- *It's not about you at all - it's about Christ*

- *What a major relief!*

- Yet when you go, weak as you are, and stand with the authority of Christ
... evil has to give way

Every single time...

... I've gone to pray at a house where people have felt disturbed

... they've phoned later to say the problem has now gone

- That's so exciting to hear, and nothing at all to do with me

And the final thought on this topic...

... is that you have a church community for a reason

- In 1 Corinthians when the church is compared to the body, Paul jokes, 'What if the hand should say to the foot: I do not need you!'
 - How ridiculous!
 - ◆ Yet we do exactly that in relation to this topic of evil
- Some in our church will be more in tune with the spiritual realm than others
 - Some will have gifts of discernment, or a spiritual ability to notice or hear from God on things in ways that the rest of us don't

It's really easy to say: 'I don't need those people'

- And there can be an arrogance that says: 'Because I'm not gifted that way, no one else could be either.'
 - Yet in times of sustained spiritual attack, it's often those very people that we need
 - The arrogant or independent spirit in us falls away when we are desperate
... and we realise that God made those people and those giftings as part of the church because we really need them

Let's not be a church that's uninformed about evil

... and let's value the whole body of Christ and all the giftings in it

- Because it's together, not divided, that he called us to stand
- As Ephesians has it:

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on all of God's armor so that you (plural - all of you together) will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil.

With the power of Christ

... and the body of Christ

... we have no reason to fear

PRAYER

Philippians 4:6-8

6 Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

8 And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.