

Sustained Spiritual Attack: Threats to Wholeness series

Those of you with great memories...

... will recall that before our Godspace 9-5 series we had a counsellor come and talk about Unforgiveness

- Then after that I did a talk on Self Image

These were part of a series called Threats to Wholeness

... which we continue today with part three: 'Sustained Spiritual Attack'

Some of you may be new to this as a topic

... but I'm guessing most of us in the room have experienced spiritual attack of some kind

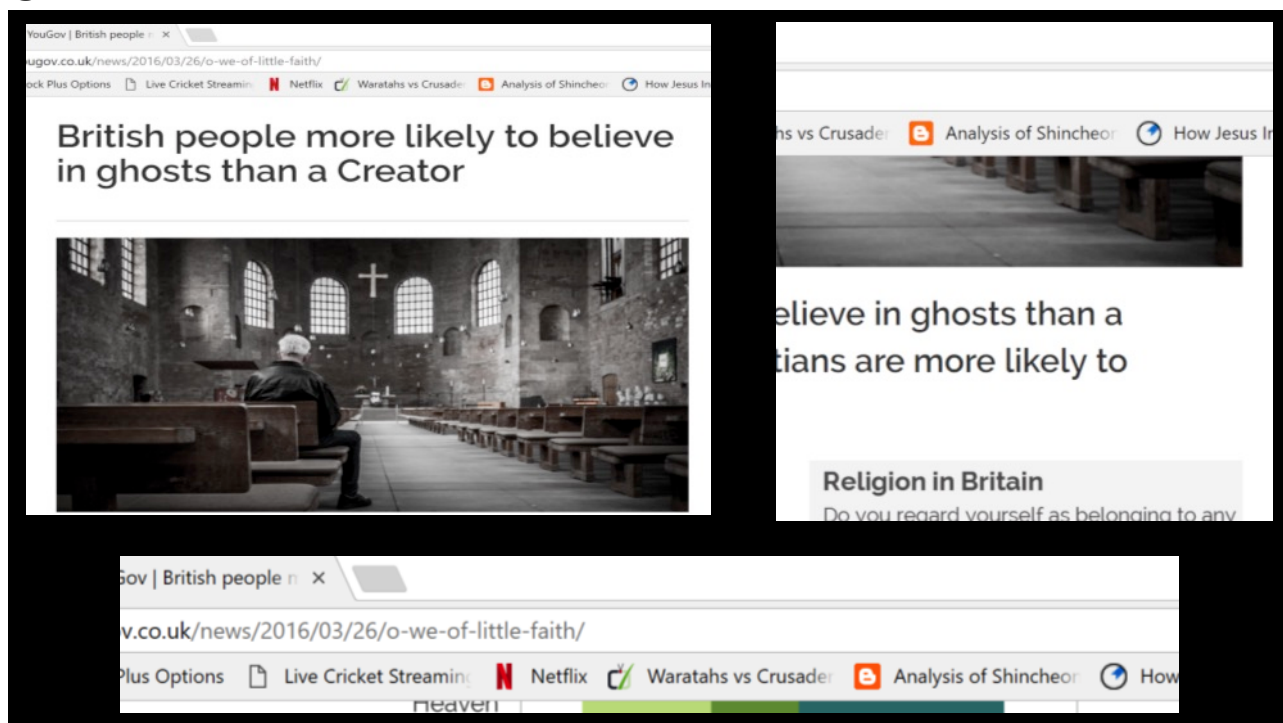
I thought we could start with a story...

- So I've asked Pastor Jess to come and tell us about an experience of spiritual attack that she had
 1. Last January you experienced some kind of spiritual attack. Tell us about that.
 2. Why do you think this happened to you at that time?
 3. What did you learn from it?

I suspect that many of us have stories like this one of Jess's

- But that doesn't mean we all understand them in the same way
 - Almost 50% of our country affiliated with Christianity in our last census (48.9%)
 - ◆ But it gets interesting when you ask what Christians believe about good and evil

For example, here's a fascinating survey based article from the UK



- According to these YouGov stats, they have a similar percentage of people who identify as Christians to us here in NZ
 - But only 55% of those who identify as Christians in the UK believe there is a God

- And so comes this revealing article that says, ***‘British people are more likely to believe in ghosts than a Creator. And self identified Christians are more likely to believe in aliens than the devil!’***

And I think this summary statement from the article knocks it on the head:

- *“There is a tendency to believe in the friendlier parts of faith, than those which are difficult to contemplate. People who say they are Christian are more likely to definitely believe in heaven than hell, and more likely to definitely believe in angels than the Devil.”*

So what do we all believe about the nature of evil?

- And where do our beliefs come from?
- What I want to look at today, is what the Bible says about the nature of evil
 - And in light of that, how might we deal with sustained spiritual attack

PRAYER

Luke 4:1-13 NLT

4 Then Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan River. He was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where he was tempted by the devil for forty days. Jesus ate nothing all that time and became very hungry.

3 Then the devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread.”

4 But Jesus told him, “No! The Scriptures say, ‘People do not live by bread alone.’[b]”

5 Then the devil took him up and revealed to him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

6 “I will give you the glory of these kingdoms and authority over them,” the devil said, “because they are mine to give to anyone I please. 7 I will give it all to you if you will worship me.”

8 Jesus replied, “The Scriptures say, ‘You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.’”

9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! 10 For the Scriptures say,

‘He will order his angels to protect and guard you.

11 And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’”

12 Jesus responded, “The Scriptures also say, ‘You must not test the Lord your God.’[e]”

13 When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came.

What do we learn from this passage?

1. There is such a thing as a personal Devil

- Jesus refers to the Devil as if he is real, not figurative
- And if it seemed that this was just a one off passage that could be explained away somehow ... there are almost 50 references to the Devil or Satan in the New Testament ... and they are all deadly serious
- So whether it’s a popular belief or not is one thing ... but it’s certainly a biblical belief

Now the horns and pitchfork stuff...

... is not in the Bible

- Those images come from medieval paintings
- By contrast, Ezekiel 28 - which can only be talking about the devil, describes him as: *“Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created. Until unrighteousness was found in you.”*

2. Temptation is one of his tools

When someone says they don't believe in the spiritual realm

... you could say: '**Well have you ever felt tempted by something?**'

... and you say: 'What exactly is that invisible force, that's pulling you towards something?'

- Everyone knows what temptation is

Just like a magpie hones in on shiny things

... so there are things that draw us

... lust, power, greed, whatever it is for you

- Everyone has a weakness for something
 - You don't have to be a christian to know that magnetic kind of power, drawing you towards something that you know isn't good for you

3. His work is subtle, and often appears reasonable

The Devil says to Jesus...

- "Turn these stones into bread"
 - ·And you've got to ask: What is actually so wrong with what the Devil's asking here?
 - ·It's not a sin to turn stones into bread
 - ◆ Pretty soon Jesus is going to feed 5,000 people making loaves and fish out of pretty much nothing
 - So why not now?
- ·It's not a sin. He has the ability to do it. He's hungry. What's the problem?

'You could rule these Kingdoms of the World'...

... says the Devil

- ·There's not much wrong with that either
 - ◆ ·It's Jesus' right and destiny to rule the Kingdoms of the world
- ·And having Jesus rule would be a good thing
 - ◆ ·What's the problem?

What the Devil is offering Jesus, is a simple way...

... without any cost, a shortcut

- ·He's offering Jesus a crown, without the cross
- ·He'll do exactly the same with you

A fourth observation here is that:

4. Appropriate Scripture stops him

I love how simply and quietly Jesus responds

- There are no formulas
 - He doesn't need to yell, or go on for hours
- Just a simple, one sentence, verse from the Bible
 - Spiritual Warfare doesn't have to be complicated or formulaic

Of course there are times where things look different...

... where Jesus does deliverance of demons

... or prays all night

- But right here, when faced with Devil himself, Jesus just replies with a verse of Scripture

A final observation from Luke 4 is that...

5. Spiritual attacks tend to come at significant or vulnerable moments

- There is so much at stake for Jesus in Luke 4
 - *He's just been baptised*
 - *He's alone and hungry*

- *And he is just about to begin his public ministry!*

The same will be true for you

- The times you'll be attacked and feel that pull of temptation will be times when you're tired, lonely, downcast or depleted
 - That's how the power of evil works

Those are some key points from Luke 4

- Do these make sense to you?
 - Is your experience anything like that of Jesus?

So looking more widely in Scripture now...

... how many of you had times where constant accusatory thoughts come in to your mind?

- Like:
 - *You're stupid*
 - *You can never change*
 - *God is fed up with you*
 - *You messed up - you always do*
 - *No one really likes you, they just pretend to*
 - *There's nothing special about you; you deserve to be overlooked*

What's the result of that kind of thinking?

- Depression, low self esteem, isolation

The Bible tells us that this is one of the ways evil works

- The Devil is described at times as The Accuser
 - Here in Revelation 12, he is 'the one who accuses them before God, day and night'

Maybe you've had a sustained spiritual attack of this kind?

The Devil is also described as the Tempter

- As Paul writes in 1 Thess 3:5 - "I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you"
 - And of course, the story of the Temptations of Christ that we just heard

Maybe sustained spiritual attack for you...

... comes through that constant thing you feel tempted with

Or maybe the attack you have felt has been more about **division**?

- Throughout the whole story of Scripture God is drawing people together in Oneness, in Community
 - ... while Satan is tearing them apart
- Satan's goal it to tear apart churches, marriages, and families

One thing that bugs me...

... is that pretty much every thing you read about Spiritual Warfare

... goes straight to Ephesians 6 - The Armour of God

... and applies it in an individualistic way

... about how individuals can protect themselves from evil, as if that's it's key meaning

The book of Ephesians is all about the church

- It's about how we can create a community of oneness, of togetherness
- People forget this context entirely - as if Eph 6 is divorced from the rest of the book of Ephesians

In the first place, the armour of God passage

... is about **how the church** together **should put on its breastplate of righteousness**

... and its sword of the Spirit

... and shield of faith to stop the fiery darts of the evil one - because he wants to tear it apart!

Paul's saying...

... when you build a community of oneness like I described in chs 1-5
... you can expect that the Devil will try and rip it apart

Too often in churches today...

... Christians care about how to keep themselves safe from the Devil
... but don't care enough about how to keep their church safe
■ That's missing the point of Ephesians!

And it's missing seeing how the Devil operates

- He wants to break up churches, and marriages, and families

And it stems right back to the Garden of Eden

... where his actions result in Adam and Eve, cast out of Eden
... separated from God; division

Why don't we pray:

*'May the armour of God be on my family
May the armour of God be on my church
To protect it from the evil one'?*

The Devil also works through disempowerment

- Ephesians 6 also talks about powers and rulers and authorities that stand in our way
- There are systems and structures in this world that are evil
 - Like the dictatorship of North Korea
 - Like the caste system of India
 - Like a cult
 - Or like a runaway housing market that allows greed to flourish and shuts out newcomers

All those people are victims of disempowerment

... those millions of north Korean civilians
... those street sweepers in India
... and so on

Then probably the devil's biggest tool of all...

... is **deception**

"Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." - 2 Cor 11:14

"The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?" - Gen 3:1

"For you are the children of your father the devil, and you love to do the evil things he does. He was a murderer from the beginning. He has always hated the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, it is consistent with his character; for he is a liar and the father of lies." - Jn 8:44

The reason this is so dangerous

... is because, when you're being tempted, you generally know that you're being tempted

- But when you're being deceived you don't know
 - that's what deception is

As you can see looking at all of this together...

... the Bible presents the work of evil as varied, clever, subtle and multi faceted

And if we figured it were nothing much to be concerned about...

... Scripture makes it very plain in 1 Peter 5:

8 Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.

It's crucial that we know how all of this works...

... so we can stay alert

- These things have the power to make us fearful, depressed, powerless, directionless, self doubting, and to break our relationships

But it's also crucial that we know that God has defeated it

Many think of good and evil...

... as two equal and opposing forces

- But the Bible doesn't present them as equal at all

Satan didn't create the universe, God did

- Satan is a created being, just like us
 - He only has any power because God gave it to him
 - And God can restrain that power at any stage

6 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

The Devil can't be everywhere at once

... as God can

- His influence comes through his network of evil spirits
 - Which would mean most of us have never encountered the Devil himself

The Devil doesn't know everything...

... and doesn't have the same power or authority as God

More than that...

- Jesus came to 'destroy his work'

"But the Son of God came to destroy the works of the devil." - 1 John 3:8

- And He did that, not in a show of strength, as in who has the biggest muscles
- He did it at the cross
 - It's the most profound way of winning a battle
- And Ephesians 1 says:

21 Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. - Eph 1:21

And where does that leave us?

"4 But you belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory over those people, because the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world." - 1 John 4:4

There is so much more in this topic that's important...

... that I've decided I want to do a part two on this next week

- There are tools in the Bible for how to combat those five different forms of spiritual attack

Let me close with something personal:

I've been in a massive spiritual battle this year

... relating to the spread of this cult in Auckland called Shinchonji

- We put out a booklet about it some months back

I got hold of a copy of the secret book...

... written by the leader of this cult

... and in it he claims on just about every page, to be the Messiah

- Many who are in this cult here in Auckland, don't realise that its goal is to promote the worship of an 85 year old Korean man as the Messiah
- ... because they are not allowed to see his secret book
- All they know is, they are going to Bible Studies

At those Bible studies there is subtle manipulation ...

... with people who are planted there to act enthusiastic so that newcomers are hooked in

- ◆ There's love bombing
- ◆ And later on there's guilt and fear and thought reform

I know this because I've talked with people...

... who have been in this cult and managed to get out of it

I've also observed how the personalities of those in it...

- ... change so radically
- ... how they lose the ability to really think for themselves
- ... and how it destroys families

Ephesians 5:11 says:

11 Take no part in the worthless deeds of evil and darkness; instead, expose them.

I decided I'm going to do that

- I'm going to expose what they do, rather than wait for them to deceive a whole lot more Christians
- ... and destroy more families

Either next weekend or the one after

- ... you'll see an article in the NZ Herald that quotes me
- ... and a video clip with me in it also

It's only a start

- I have people praying for me in this
- And I'd appreciate your prayers also

I want to pray...

- ... and then sing with you three songs
- ... that remind us of the power that is in Christ
- They remind us of why we don't need to fear
 - And that even when we face sustained spiritual attack
 - ... it is on a limited time frame
- God himself will judge it
 - And his Son has defeated it

PRAYER

SONGS