



March 18-19, 2017  
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*Spiritual Warfare: You Gotta Be Kidding!*  
*Luke 9:1; Ephesians 2:4-6*

We continue with our series on Spiritual Warfare. Today's sermon is titled, "You Gotta Be Kidding!" Any idea where I'm going with this? Let's stand together and recite again the two great scripture texts that are guiding us in this journey, Ephesians 6:12 and I John 4:4:

*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:12*

*...Greater is he that is in [me] than he that is in the world. I John 4:4*

We are definitely talking about some dark things in this series—things that most Christians prefer to avoid, but at their peril! And I want you to hear this: there is nothing to be afraid of. Greater is he that is in us than he that is in the world. I don't want any believer walking out of here with anything other than a renewed sense of hope, peace and power regarding the spiritual struggles we certainly face. We already have the victory, but we need to learn how to live as if that were so.

So, in review, Paul teaches that we live in an overlap world between the natural realm and the spiritual realm. There is more to reality than what we perceive with our five senses. There are spiritual beings that share this space, and some of them are naughty. They have a chief hooligan whom Jesus called "Satan" or "The Devil." He also called him by another name: "The Ruler of this world."

But only for a time. Last week we learned that Jesus, by his life, death, and resurrection, conquered Satan and liberated us from his clutches. Do you remember the name of that doctrine? Christus Victor! Hebrews summarizes this doctrine:

*"...Through death he ... destroy[ed] the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver[ed] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2: 14-15*

Today, I'd like to dig deeper into Jesus' ministry of deliverance, see what we learn from him, and then share some news with you that might make you say, "You gotta be kidding me!"

Ready?

Near the beginning of his gospel, Matthew summarizes the ministry of Jesus:

*And Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all the sick, those afflicted with various diseases and pains, those oppressed by demons, those having seizures, and paralytics, and he healed them. Matt 4; 23-25.*

Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing was amazing. But nothing was more awe-inspiring than what happened when he encountered those who were "oppressed by demons." As I told you, this had never been seen before. In the Old Testament, there were healings and miracles and even people raised from the dead. But it is only when Jesus comes on the scene that we see this battle between the powerful Son of God and the demonic forces that hold human beings captive.

There are 6 exorcisms described in detail and about 23 other references to demonic activity scattered throughout the synoptic gospels. We are so used to reading them that we forget how spectacular they were. I'd like to look at the *most* spectacular exorcism which Matthew, Mark and Luke ALL mention in their gospels. Try to let your imagination run wild as I remind you of this familiar story.

Jesus and his disciples have just crossed the Sea of Galilee to an area known as the Gerasenes. As they beached the boat, a naked, crazed man came running up. He had superhuman strength. When townspeople tried to chain him, he just snapped the chains. He lived in the tombs—among the dead—and at night could be heard howling in anguish. And he was a cutter. His entire body was covered by self-inflicted wounds made with sharp-edged stones. He is one of the most pathetic creatures in the Bible.

Now, if you were one of the disciples and you suddenly saw this monster running towards you, how would YOU feel? As he drew near, he threw himself at Jesus' feet and cried out, "*What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God. I adjure you by God, do not torment me!*" This is the only time Jesus talks with the demons. He asks, "*What is your name?*" The response? "*My name is Legion, for we are many.*" A legion was a 6,000 man fighting unit in the Roman army. This poor man was bedeviled by not just one, but by MANY, many evil spirits. No wonder he was in such anguish.

The spirits knew Jesus was about to send them into the abyss, so they asked a favor. Remember what it was? "*Send us into that herd of pigs.*" Poor pigs. Two thousand of them just minding their own business, wallowing in the mud. Jesus obliges and orders them out of that wretch and into the pigs. Do you recall their fate? They took a swine dive. Right into the lake. And that man was set free. Astonishingly clean after years of torment.

That's just one of six specific exorcism stories. The demoniac in the synagogue at Capernaum. The boy possessed by spirits that threw him into the fire and water to harm him. We have heard these stories since Sunday School; we've become numb to them. But can you re-imagine

how spectacular they must have been? A bleeding, naked, crazy man running at you, screaming at the top of his lungs. A man screaming and convulsing in the middle of church? A little boy, foaming at the mouth. And all of them, delivered! Set free! It would have been terrifying and exhilarating...all at once! Right?

Jesus acted out of compassion, of course, when he took pity on these wretched souls. But exorcisms were primarily a demonstration of Jesus' spiritual authority. Again and again, people who saw Jesus in action would remark about his "authority." The Greek word was "exousia!" Forty-one times that word is used in the gospels! In the Capernaum synagogue, for instance, the astounded people said, *"What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."*

One thing I hope to accomplish in this message is to restore some of the astonishment we first had when we heard these stories. To be reminded again of the "exousia" of Jesus; Christus Victor! Satan might be the "Ruler of this World," but every time they went toe to toe, Jesus kicked Satan's butt!

The disciples must have been astonished too, don't you think? Here were teenagers and twenty-somethings witnessing displays of spiritual power the likes of which neither they nor anyone had ever seen. Spectacular, right?

But do you know when they got REALLY astonished? When Jesus said, "Okay, you've seen what I can do. Now, you go out and do it too. Buddy up. Two by two, and go get 'em!" Listen to Luke 9:1: *And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases...* Can you see the looks on their faces? How in the world were they going to do these things? How? Because Jesus gave THEM his authority! And sure enough, out they go, two by two and discover that in the name of Jesus, they DO have the authority and power. People are delivered, people are healed, and the Kingdom of God spread by the authority of Jesus *through his people*.

"But," you might protest, "those were the twelve apostles. The hand-picked followers of Jesus. They were special!" Okay, how about the 72? Did you remember that there was another circle of disciples outside the inner twelve? Luke calls them the 72. In Luke 10, after Jesus sends out the twelve, he sends out the 72 with the same assignment. And listen to what happened: *The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" And he said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.*

Again, imagine how astonished the 72 were to discover that Jesus had endowed THEM with the power to battle the Devil. After all, THEY weren't in Jesus' inner circle. But apparently, because they were his followers—his disciples—they too possessed all that was necessary to act in his authority and power! Astounding!

Still, you might argue, the 72 were ALSO a part of Jesus' group. That's why they had special authority. Okay, now we come to the "you gotta be kidding me" part of the sermon. Because guess what! The Bible teaches that the *exousia* of Jesus: the spiritual authority he granted to his inner circle of twelve, the spiritual authority he granted to the next circle of disciples, the 72—that same authority he has granted to YOU. As Christians—as Spirit-filled followers of Jesus—WE have a spiritual authority that most Christians don't even know they possess and a power that most Christians neglect.

Doubt me? In Ephesians 2:4, Paul writes, *"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ...and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."*

Notice: Paul's not writing to the 12 Apostles. Or to the 72 Disciples. He's writing to ordinary believers in Ephesus who never met Jesus. And he says that these ordinary believers are seated *"...with [Christ] in the heavenly places."* This is language of *enthronement!* Of royalty! When we are saved by Jesus and his Holy Spirit fills us, not only are we adopted into God's family, we are invited into the throne room of Jesus! Not just to bow before him but to sit beside him! Do you realize how amazing this is? When we become Christians, Jesus grants to us the same authority he granted to the 12 and to the 72. He reminded them of that in the Great Commission, *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go...!"* In other words, "I have all authority...it is mine to hold... mine to confer...and I confer that authority upon you."

If you learn nothing today, learn this; let this astonishing reality sink in: you have been granted the authority of Jesus Christ! This means that when we encounter the Devil we don't just meekly submit to his harassment. We have the *exousia*, the conferred authority of Jesus, to fight back. To talk back. We will look at HOW we do spiritual battle over the next three weeks, but I'd like to remind us of how JESUS dealt with the enemy. It is worth paying attention to, and frankly, I think you will be encouraged because it is so simple. Here is some of what we learn from Jesus about spiritual warfare.

First, and most importantly, Jesus functioned under the anointing and direction of the Holy Spirit. For instance, we read that it was the Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. We should never attempt spiritual intervention without first inviting the Holy Spirit to fill us up! Second, Jesus spoke out loud to the evil spirits. Why? Because they are not omniscient. Psalm 139 says, *"Before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether."* God knows everything. That's why we can pray silently. But the Devil can't read our minds; we need to speak out loud to him so he knows what are demanding!

Third, with the exception of Legion, Jesus never converses with evil spirits; in fact, when demons try to speak, he orders them to shut up. He didn't want to hear their testimony.

Fourth, Jesus never touches a demon-possessed person. This is interesting because he OFTEN touched a person he was healing. But, perhaps for some spiritual reason, he refused to touch someone who was possessed by an unclean spirit.

Fifth, His rebukes were always short. No long-winded incantations. He said simple things like, "Be silent and come out of him!" or, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again!" And finally, Jesus taught that after you command the enemy to leave, you always pray that the Holy Spirit come and fill any empty spaces. Otherwise, that spirit might come back with seven of his nasty buddies. As you become more confident in your spiritual authority in Christ, these are practices you might want to keep in mind.

Okay, all of this is fine in theory, but how does it work in real life? Let me share a story from one of our members. He and his wife adopted a child from another land, a place where there is a lot of demonic activity. They noticed that he seems to be two different persons. He can be sweet and compliant one moment, and suddenly, there is a violent shift in his personality. He becomes mean and deceitful. They were involved in our Upward Basketball program and this young man heard Pastor Ellis preach on the celebration night. On the way home he told his dad, "I don't want to lie anymore."

With permission, I share with you the rest of the story as my friend told it to me.

*On March 8th, he came home from school. He'd gotten into trouble again and was trying to lie his way out of it. Typical nine year old behavior, you might think. However, when we were talking to him, we noticed that he began to look at us strangely. His eyes twitched, and they looked different; empty. His expression, his whole countenance changed. We'd seen this once or twice in the past. It could last for hours. We decided to end the conversation and left his room.*

*About ten seconds later I felt a Holy Spirit nudge to pray for him. I went back into his room, said "I'm going to pray for you", placed my hand on his chest and spoke these words: "In the name of Jesus I claim victory over the enemy and command the enemy to leave you immediately." I then prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill him up.*

*Within a couple minutes, his normal countenance returned. He's been great since then.*

I've said this several times: not every difficult thing we face is demonic. There is plenty in this sinful world that can mess with our lives. But we in the Western Church have become so intellectually arrogant that we no longer take seriously the spiritual enemies that Jesus took very seriously. The astounding thing is to realize that if we are in Christ, WE have been granted his authority over these forces!

In fact Paul, writing to the Romans, put it in these dramatic terms: *"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet!" Romans 16:20*

"Crush Satan under YOUR feet." John wrote that Jesus came to destroy the works of the Devil. Wouldn't you like to be part of that? What would be different in your home, your marriage, your work or school, if you walked in the authority Jesus has granted you?