

## **MAXIMUM IMPACT IN OUR WORLD**

**November 22, 2009**

**SERMON TITLE- ACTS-traordinary: Breaking Spiritual Stongholds**

**Acts 8:4-8**

### **NOTES BY BILLY GROSS**

(working off of Acts 8 and capturing this theme from several other encounters in the book of Acts)

#### **Specific questions that arise about evil spirits (Satan and his demons):**

1. Are they personal beings with intentional agenda or just the nebulous representation of evil in the world?
2. What powers do they have?
3. Can they possess born-again followers of Christ?

**Culture has greatly influenced our understanding of the supernatural (both the good and bad sides) . . . that the spiritual realm is not real but more symbolic and that there are not REAL, self-aware beings that operate in the spiritual realm. This is in direct opposition to what the scriptures teach . . .**

- Ephesians 6
- Acts 8:4-8
- I Peter 5:8-9
- Matt 4:1-11

#### **Two dangerous extremes:**

- To be ignorant/oblivious of the reality of our enemy, the devil and his demon servants.
- To become consumed with our enemy . . . looking for him and seeing him in every difficult element of our lives.

We want to be consumed WITH JESUS! The best defense is a strong offense . . . if we are focused on Jesus - abiding in Him, following Him, connected with others doing the same, we are strong against whatever Satan might bring against us.

#### **Can a Christian be possessed?**

- “Possessed” is not actually the Greek word used in the scripture (sorry - I didn’t get the

word). The word used really means “to come under the influence of”. We who are born-again children of God, who have received His Holy Spirit into our own (or rather given ours to Him), cannot then be possessed or owned by an evil spirit. We can, however, give evil spirits “permission” or access to come into our lives and exercise influence in our thinking, feelings, and behaviors.

- Ephesians 4:26-27 (giving the devil a foothold)
- James 4:7 (submitting to God and RESISTING the devil)

**How does Satan or a demon “gain ground” in our lives? (Invading and securing a position in some area of our life from which to operate and attack) . . .**

1. Ignorance - we don't know much about Satan or how to “resist him” because we neglect the WORD of God)
2. Personal sin – always opens the door to the enemy. In sin, we are shutting God out, ignoring His ways, and this essentially grants the enemy permission to come into our lives and exercise his influence.
3. Sins of others against us – wounds that weaken us. These are vulnerable places the enemy will exploit . . . with bitterness, unforgiveness, doubt of God's love and goodness, despair that we cannot be healed, etc.
4. Invitation – willingly pursuing and inviting the powers of darkness into our lives. Typically this is a gradual slide that begins with curiosity or shallow fleshly desires. Rarely does someone decide on day: I think I will invest my life in the occult.

**There are 2 kinds of “battling” against our enemy of darkness:**

1. Daily wrestlings in the course of life. Daily temptations that all of us face.
  - a. Ephesians 6 – *daily* put on the armor of God: the of truth and reality of who we are/what we have in Christ.
2. Spiritual Strongholds – *any negative pattern of thinking, feeling, or behavior that is repetitive, debilitating, and controlling*. These strongholds become WALLS that block our walk with God; keeping us from living freely in Him.

**Breaking such Strongholds:**

1. Ask God to reveal when/how the stronghold was established. What is its root?
  - a. Emotional, relational wounds

- b. Vows we have spoken (the words we speak are powerful)
  - c. Ungodly beliefs (lies we have come to believe and live from)
  - d. Generational sin – a stronghold rooted in my family lineage (parents, g’parents, even for *many* generations)
2. Take responsibility for my part in dealing with this issue:
    - a. Forgiving others
    - b. Renouncing vows
    - c. Renewing my mind with God’s truth that refutes the lies
  3. Take authority over the enemy to BREAK the stronghold, and tell him to leave - to surrender his *taken* ground.
    - a. He must obey because we have the authority of Jesus – we are “seated with Christ” Ephesians 2:6
    - b. It’s not just by speaking Jesus’ name, but by being united with Him, surrendered to Him as Lord. In this RELATIONSHIP, we have authority and power.
  4. Claim God’s promises and walk in them by faith
    - a. “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Christ.” (Philipp 1:6)
    - b. “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” (I John 4:4)
    - c. Ephesians 1:11-20, 3:14-21 (Awesome reminders and prayers of hope and power)
    - d. The breaking of a stronghold and the reclaiming of ground doesn’t automatically fix everything; it simply **frees us** to move forward with the Lord. We must still deal with our weaknesses. We will still battle temptation. The enemy will surely come back with lies and reminders of the past. We must still work on #2 above. We must abide in Christ, feeding on His Word, devoted to prayer, connected in community . . . daily putting on the armor of God.

Pam, thanks so much for your gracious, vulnerable testimony of God’s grace that broke strongholds in your life and freed you to walk more freely with Him. Your story was moving, powerful, and inspiring.