May 16/17, 2009

Facing Demons

Facing Our Stuff: Finding Hope in Our Hurts, Hang-Ups and Habits

John 8: 31-45; 1 John 2: 15-17

Pastor Bryan Clark

Back in the 70's there was a comedian whose trademark line was, "The devil made me do it." Now we laugh at that—I do too—but that statement is actually more true than untrue. In both the Old and the New Testaments God affirms that there is an enemy by the name of Satan, or the Devil, who has an army of demons. It makes it quite clear that this is war. I would suggest to you that most people experience demonic influence on a daily basis. Now when I say that, what are the images that are conjured up in your head? You have an image of something out of *The Exorcist*: voices, and people flopping on the floor and frothing at the mouth. I would suggest to you that that doesn't have anything to do with what I'm talking about. As a matter of fact the chance of you ever encountering something like that in your lifetime is extremely remote. I would suggest to you that that imagery is actually a very clever distraction by the enemy himself, to distract you away from what is his strategy. The enemy's strategy is much more subtle; it's much more powerful and it's much more effective than that.

If you have a Bible, turn with us this morning to John, Chapter 8. I want to look at two passages this morning, both written by John. The first one in John, Chapter 8, is a very important part of John's Gospel. Jesus clearly identifies Himself as the Messiah. He picks a very strategic time in the Hebrew calendar and He stands before the people and He says, "I am the light of the world; he who follows after Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." By John, Chapter 8, Jesus has put a significant amount of evidence on the table that validates He is who He says He is. You remember in Mark, Chapter 2—we studied this a couple of weeks ago—when Jesus said, "In order that you might know that I have the power to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"rise up and walk." Now if you were in that crowd that day, and you saw that miracle, wouldn't you have to back up and say, "This doesn't seem like the average preacher"? By this point in John, Chapter 8, Jesus has demonstrated that He is God in the flesh over and over and over again. The evidence on the table is significant but the religious elite still don't buy it and the tension between them and Jesus continues to increase. In this particular passage Jesus is talking to a mixed audience, between those who seem to believe and those that are still choosing to deny. We pick it up in verse 31:

> **So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."** (*NASB, John 8:31-32)

These are familiar words. Jesus said these words, or words like them, over and over again in the Gospels. If you are a Christ-follower, then you will know the truth and you will live the truth. To *continue in the truth* is a Greek word that is often translated "abide". You abide in it; you live in it. You know it and you live that way…then with a reminder that you shall know the truth and the truth will set you free. The Hebrew people responded—the religious elite responded—by saying, "*We really don't know what You mean because we don't live in bondage."* And Jesus responded to that by saying, "*Well, actually you do. Anyone who lives in sin lives in bondage. But when the Son sets you free, you shall be free indeed."* Then they got

into a big discussion about who was right. The Hebrew people said, "*Well wait a minute. We're children of Abraham. Abraham was our father and because of our religious traditions and because of who we are as the Hebrew people, we're right and You're wrong."* And Jesus said, "*No, once again you don't understand. If you were actually children of Abraham, you'd get it. But you don't get it and the reason you don't get it is because Abraham isn't your father."* We pick up the story again in verse 43. Jesus asks the question:

> **"Why do you not understand what I am saying? Is it because you cannot hear My word?"**

He's raising the question, "*What's the deal with you people? How come you don't get it?"* He answers His own question.

Verse 44:

> **"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies."**

Now again let's remind ourselves, Jesus was not saying these words to the prostitutes. Jesus was not saying these words to the sinners and the tax collectors. He was uttering these words to the religious elite. And He said to them, "*You know, you really aren't from Abraham, because if you were from Abraham, you'd get this. You have a different father and your father is the devil. And the devil is a liar. He's a deceiver. He's a murderer. As a matter of fact, not only is he a liar, that's his very essence. That's his very nature. He can't do anything but lie."* Just as Jesus not only **speaks** the truth, Jesus **is** the Truth. In the same way Satan not only lies, but his very essence, his very nature is he's a liar. That's all he brings to the table.

Now you start to put this together and it makes sense. If it is the truth that sets you free, then this is going to be a war of lies. Think of it this way: The enemy, Satan, and his demonic armies virtually have nothing to offer you that is better than what God offers you. Nothing! You can't name one thing! Everything that God has to offer you is better than what the enemy has to offer. So what do you do? He's only got one option: *"I must lie. I must deceive. I must promise you something I can never deliver."* It's the only option he has. It's very important for us to understand this daily battle we're engaged in is a battle over what is true and what is a lie.

The New Testament says that Satan is the god of this world. Another way of saying that is that he is the architect of the culture in which we live. He's the architect of the value system; he's the architect of the culture. The Bible says that he is like "a roaring lion seeking someone to devour." Just to make it personal, you need to know that every single day you do have an enemy whose number one mission is to destroy you. The Bible says that he disguises himself as an *angel of light*. See, he's very clever; he's very subtle. One of the big problems with deception is, when you are being deceived, you don't know it. That's the whole point. You think what you believe is true. You think you're on the right track. You think that this is going to work out for you. That's the whole deception. He disguises himself as an *angel of light.* The Proverb says, "There is a way that seems right to a man or a woman, but the end is destruction." That's right where these Jewish people were. Over and over and over again Jesus

had demonstrated to them, in ways they could not possibly have missed, yet they couldn't see it because they were so deceived.

When Satan is described as an *angel of light*, one of the first things that comes to my mind is religion. I'm convinced one of the cleverest of all the enemy's ploys is religion. It's exactly where these people were. They were steeped in their own traditions. They were up to their eyebrows in their own religious beliefs, to the extent that they could no longer see or hear truth, even when it was so evident before them. I think this is a huge problem for us in the Midwest. I hear it all the time from people. Their response is, "Well, I'm Catholic; Well, I'm Baptist; I'm Methodist; I'm Lutheran; I'm an Adventist; I'm a Buddhist; I'm Berean." Put whatever you want in there. People get so stuck in their religious traditions; they get so stuck in a belief system, that they're no longer pursuing what is true. They're just seeking to defend what they've always believed. And it reaches a point where they can no longer see the truth, even when it's clearly presented before them. The enemy, he's a liar; he's a deceiver, and he's very good at what he does.

Jesus says a really interesting thing in verse 45:

"But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me."

Now look at what He said. He didn't say, "E*ven though* I speak the truth." He says it's "*because* I speak the truth." In other words what He's saying is, "*The reason this battle is gaining intensity is because I'm speaking truth.*" There were lots of false religions in the first century that the religious leaders completely ignored. But, without question, Jesus was in their crosshairs. Why is that? That's what He's saying here. Because the enemy doesn't really care what the lie is, the world is filled with lies. They're all fine with him. He's only got one mission and that mission is to attack what is true. So Jesus is saying *because* this is true, they're on the attack.

That is really interesting to think about. We live in a culture today where people say, "You know, all religions are basically the same. They all eventually lead to God." Let me ask you a question then. If that is true, then why is it around the world today there is only one belief system that is systematically attacked on a daily basis? There's only one....and that's Christianity. If they're all the same, how do you explain that? The enemy is fine with all the lies, but where he's going to put his focus of attention is on that which is true. I mentioned that a couple of weeks ago—we see that in our own country. It is completely incorrect politically, very intolerant, to mock or make fun of any world religion, except one. Today they make entire movies for the purpose of mocking the Gospel of Jesus. They have entire art shows for the simple purpose of mocking the Gospel of Jesus. Comedians have their whole routines simply for the purpose of mocking Jesus. Why is it that every other world religion is off-limits but one? Could it be the architect of this culture has his eyes set on the one, and the only one, that is true?

It's possible, in this culture in which we live, that this may be one of our strongest apologetics, raising the question, "If they're all the same, why is it that one is persecuted above and beyond all others?" Jesus is answering that right here: it's because it's *true*. And the god of this world is fine with the lies; he is on a mission to destroy what is true. Every day, we're bombarded with lies. The enemy is on a mission to destroy you. And he's going to do it with the most subtle of lies regarding decisions you make every single day. In Romans, Chapter 1, Paul talks

about this movement from what God always intended for us, into immorality, into sexual immorality, and into homosexuality. And he puts it all under the umbrella that they exchanged the truth for a lie. That's the deal.

Turn with me now to 1 John, Chapter 2. John continues to talk about this same subject. I want to give you an example of the enemy's strategy in a very specific, practical way. In 1 John, Chapter 2, John is talking about overcoming the evil one, and how we do that. We pick it up in verse 15. He says:

> **Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.**

What does he mean by "the world"? He means the world's system. He means the system of the world that the enemy has put into place and the "things of the world" are the expressions of that value system. We'll talk about that in just a minute. He says you can't love the Father and love the world. There's a world system; it's designed by the enemy to destroy us. You can't love the world and love the Father. It would be very similar to my saying I can't love my wife and a mistress. I can't love them both; I'm going to have to make a choice. That's exactly what he's saying. It's very similar to what Jesus said in the Gospels. So what does he mean by "the world"?

> **For all that is in the world** (*he's going to define it*)**, the lust of the flesh…**(vs.16a)

Now what do you think of when you hear those words "the lust of the flesh"? A lot of people immediately think of sexual sins, or some sort of debauchery, or...whatever. That's really not what he's talking about here. If you go all the way back to the Old Testament and track it through, the proper definition of flesh is *that which I can do apart from God*. It's what we talked about last week from Genesis 3. It's that lust, that desire, that craving I have deep within me, as someone made in the image of God, to be my own god. I want to run my own show. I want to call my own shots. I'll decide for myself what's right and wrong. And the lie of the enemy is, "If you do that, you will be free." But of course, as we learned last week, that isn't the route to freedom; that's the route to bondage. There's a lot of good that's done in our world today that is driven by the lust of the flesh. Religion is the lust of the flesh. That's why it has such appeal. There's something deep within me that wants to believe I can do this myself. I can earn this; I can merit this. I can be religious enough that, at the end of the day, God says, "Okay, you're in." I can pull it off. There's something deep within me that wants to believe I can do that.

In every arena of life we experience the reality that you don't get something for nothing. You have to earn your way. It is a performance-based culture and we experience that at every turn. So it's logical to think that's the way it works with God. And the reason it has mass appeal is that it appeals to the lust of the flesh and a belief that I can do this myself. I can be my own savior.

You go all the way back to Genesis 2 and we remind ourselves that Adam and Eve found their significance, found their value, found their purpose in life by being rightly related to God. And it is out of that relationship that they lived life. But in Genesis, Chapter 3, as we studied last week, when they sinned against God, they were immediately cut off from that relationship with God. So now that I'm cut off from my source of significance, my source of meaning, my

source of purpose, now what? I'm going to have to do it myself. I guess I'm going to have to be my own god. I guess I'm going to have to find my own significance. I'm going to have to define my own meaning. I'm going to have to determine my own purpose....and that becomes the lust of the flesh. It's based now on my ability to perform. As my own god, the only way to evaluate my significance and my value is on the basis of my performance. But how do I measure that? Well there's only one way to measure it. I have to measure it on the basis of how I compare with you. If I compare favorably with you, I feel better about myself. If you are better than me, then my self esteem goes in the tanker. And every day that's life: up and down, and up and down. And even on my best days, when I'm at the top of my game, what about tomorrow? And what about the next person that walks through the door? It's a "no-win" system. It is relentless and it destroys lives every day.

In a performance-based value system I'm not free to love you because you're the competition. I have to compete with you; I have to compare with you. I can't really celebrate who you are because the possibility is that you might be better than me...and I can't celebrate that! That's going to send my self esteem into the tanker. So I'm really not free at all—I'm enslaved to this value system. And life is about competition and comparison.

You may have walked through these doors this morning feeling that you were pretty successful. On a comparison basis you compare well. So what's in your heart is arrogance, because the basis of your self-esteem is, "I'm better than they are." On the other end of the scale you walk through the door and you have a very poor self-esteem. If you're going to be honest, you kind of think of yourself as a bit of a hopeless loser, because you don't think you compare well. Whether it's arrogance, whether it's a low self-esteem, both of you are worldly to the core. Now I know what's happening right now. Those of you who struggle with a low self-esteem are saying, "Oh, thanks a lot…just one more way that I'm a loser." I'm going to ask you not to do that. I'm not saying those words to hurt you. I'm saying those words for you to understand: *if you don't get out of this performance-based value system, it will destroy your life.* The system you're using to define your value is a lie and it is intended to destroy you.

John goes on:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes…(vs.16...)

In both the Old and New Testaments the lust of the eyes refers to covetousness—stuff and more stuff. We would probably use the word today, "materialism." If we're going to thrive in a performance-based system, there has to be some way to keep score. "I don't think you really understand…I'm really something." So I have to have a way to convince you of that, or no one's going to know. So in our Western consumer culture, it's "stuff". It's the car I drive. It's the house I own. It's my job title. It's my income. It's my profession. Those are the ways we put points on the scoreboard. If you think of this like a game, there has to be some way to keep score. That's what he's saying, "the lust of the eyes": covetousness, materialism; that's how we keep score. I will show you my value on the basis of what I own. If you don't think that's true, go back to a ten-year class reunion and listen to the game. That's exactly what it is, and we all know that's the way the game is played. And when we get caught up in that way of thinking, we end up buying cars and houses we can't afford. We have credit cards that are maxed out. We convince ourselves that we need unimaginable amounts of money in the bank to retire—more money than we could spend in a lifetime, because that isn't really my retirement. That's my self-esteem. That's my sense of significance. That's my way of saying,

"I'm somebody. I matter." The reason we struggle as Americans to be a generous people is because we cannot afford to give money away, because that's taking points off the scoreboard, and, "I can't afford to do that. I'm barely keeping up as it is." And so we can't really afford to be generous because my self-esteem can't take it. So we consume our resources on ourselves and that's part of our statement: "You need to know I matter."

John says:

> **For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, this is not from the Father, but is from the world.** (vs. 16)

All of this comes from the architect of the culture. It's his lie; it's his deception and it's intended to destroy you.

> **The world is passing away, and also its lusts…** (vs. 17a)

It's John's way of saying, "*Hey, this doesn't work. I don't care who you are. At the end of the day it's a system that cannot deliver the goods. It's a system devised by the architect of this culture and the intention is that it will destroy you."* You say, "Wow, is there an alternative?" Yes, he says so at the end of the verse:

> **…but the one who does the will of God lives forever.**

He's talked about it a lot in 1 John. There **is** an alternative. It's this scandalous thing we call *grace*—to believe that God Himself actually became flesh, in order to die on a Cross, to become the Savior of the world and offer salvation to each one of us as a gift. It's not something I can earn. It's not what I deserve. It's just freely offered as a gift. And yet the overwhelming majority of people that will draw breath on this planet will say to that gift, "No thanks, I can do it myself," which is the lie of the enemy. The fact of the matter is, God's grace makes it possible for me to step out of this performance-based system and, on the basis of His gift, offer me the forgiveness of my sin, which now makes it possible for me to be rightly related to God. And now that I'm rightly related to God, that's where I find my significance. That's where I find my meaning. That's where I find my purpose. That's where I find my value....and it has nothing to do with my performance.

I would suggest to you though, that now that my significance is found in God, it sets me free to perform at a higher level than I ever could have, because it's no longer the basis of my significance and value. I'm no longer competing with you; I'm no longer comparing with you. I am actually free to love you. I am free to celebrate your successes and it doesn't send my self-esteem into the tanker to say, "You're really good at that." **You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.**

Over the last six weeks we've talked about "Facing Our Stuff". We've talked about a lot of "stuff". But the sobering reality is that, if you don't get this one right, you stand no chance on the other topics we've talked about, because the only way out of the enemy's web is on the back of truth. And if you do not believe and live the truth, you have no chance to get out of that web. The world is filled with lies and deception. The logical question would be, *"How do we know what's true*?" The starting place has to be a living, dynamic relationship with the One who **is** Truth. It starts with the brokenness of the recognition: I can't be my own god. I can't

be my own savior. I can't run my own show. I'm just not equipped. It's a lie. And, in brokenness, to realize: I need a Savior. I need to know the One who *is* Truth. That's where the journey must begin, and from there His Spirit will guide me into that which is true. It's what Jesus said, "*You shall know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* And when the Son sets you free, you are free indeed!

Our Father, we're thankful this morning for the One who is Truth. Lord, it's a sobering reality to know there is an enemy with an army whose mission today is to destroy me, to destroy us. Lord, his weapon of choice is the lie, and every day we are pounded with lie after lie. Lord, it is only when we know the One who is Truth that we can be set free. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Facing Demons

Facing Our Stuff: Finding Hope in Our Hurts, Hang-Ups and Habits

John 8:44-47: 1 John 2:15-17

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Opening Discussion

1. What do you think of when you think about spiritual warfare?

2. How are you most likely going to face the "attack" of the enemy?

3. How do you know when you are being deceived?

Bible Study

1. Read John 8:31-47. What was the "serpent's" strategy to tempt Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 and how do Jesus' words confirm that his strategy remains the same?

2. Read 1 Peter 5:8; 2 Cor. 4:3,4, 11:4; Prov. 14:12. Put these texts together with Jesus words in John 8 and define the nature of Spiritual Warfare. What is the primary weapon of the enemy and what is the primary defense for the believer?

3. In this series we have discussed death, disease, depression, disappointment, dependence and now demons. How does the battle between the truth of Jesus and the lies of the enemy come in to play in each of these issues?

4. What lies are you especially susceptible to?

5. Read 1 John 2:15-17. Define the value system of the world (put together by the god of this world). In light of this description, what does spiritual warfare look like on a daily basis?

6. Attached is LBC's Philosophy of Spiritual Warfare. You may want to read through that document to get a broader understanding of spiritual warfare beyond what was covered in this message.

Application

1. The most intense spiritual warfare we'll face is simply the battle to determine what is true and what is a lie? What will lead to life and what will lead to bondage? How do we do that?

2. If the nature of deception is that you don't know you are being deceived, you think what you believe is true, how do we avoid being deceived?

3. Of the six topics we've discussed in this series, which one is most likely to keep you stuck in the enemies web? What can you do to stay out of the web? How can your small group help keep you out of the web?

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Philosophy of Spiritual Warfare

We believe that Satan and his army of demons are real and active in the world today. The bible states that Satan is the "prince of the power of the air" who sets the course of this world in which we live (Eph. 2:2). We believe that the Devil is the adversary of believers and is actively seeking to devour us like a lion hunts his prey (I Peter 5:8). We believe the very essence of the devil is that he is the father of lies warring against Jesus who is the Truth (John 8:44). We believe that although Satan is real and powerful he is ultimately a defeated foe. Therefore, believers should not live in fear of the enemy but in the power of the Spirit (I John 4:4). We believe a balanced view of spiritual warfare acknowledges the existence of the enemy and his intent to destroy but emphasizes our confidence and victory in Jesus as the focus of our attention. It may be tempting to try to identify if trials are from God, Satan or simply from living in a sin-cursed world. Since we believe the proper response is to focus on Jesus and walk in obedience to His truth regardless of the source of the trial we find it unnecessary and even distracting to try to identify the source of various trials.

We acknowledge that there are many differing viewpoints on the nature of spiritual warfare. Each viewpoint shares antidotal stories to demonstrate the effectiveness of a particular methodology. However, we find the emphasis in the bible to relate more to basic truths to be believed rather than formulas and methodologies to be emulated. We believe Jesus was unique as God in the flesh and therefore may not be representing a methodology for spiritual warfare any more than he represents the methodology for how believers are to respond to such issues as blindness, lameness, death, finding tax money, where to find a donkey, how to feed 5000 people or other such issues. The level of spiritual warfare experienced by God in the flesh is certainly not indicative of what should be expected by every believer. For example, no believer should expect that Satan himself will appear in person to tempt us as he did Jesus. God in the flesh certainly evoked an "all hands on deck" response from the enemy that would be considered unique in spiritual warfare.

Rather than seeking to model the methods of Jesus in spiritual warfare we need to listen to the instructions of Jesus and NT authors on the topic of spiritual warfare. The emphasis is not on methodology but obedience; not on steps but on truth. Ultimately what God honors are the hearts of the individuals involved and their willingness to believe the truth by faith. We confess that God works His power over the enemy, sometime despite poor methodology, honoring a right heart before Him (I Sam 15:22). Therefore, we believe a pure heart and clean hands before God are essential to victory in spiritual warfare. No methodology can compensate for a heart that harbors sin before God (Ps 32).

We believe every person can be influenced to lesser and greater degrees by Satan and his demons. Since the term "possession" indicates ownership we believe those who have trusted Jesus as Savior belong to Him and cannot be possessed or owned by Satan (Eph 1:13,14). We believe unbelievers are the property of the Devil by virtue of their sin nature which separates them from God (John 8:44, Eph 2:1-3). The manifestation of Satan's influence in an unbeliever's life can range from that which is blatantly obvious to that which is deceitfully subtle. The degree to which any believer is influenced by Satan is in direct proportion to the believer's willingness to believe and live the lies of the enemy. This means the level of influence in a believer's life may be anywhere from highly influenced to the point of control to no influence as the believer is controlled by the Spirit of Jesus.

We do not believe there are "magic" words to be used in spiritual warfare praying that, when said, have some supernatural effect. A prayer binding Satan is no more effective or necessary than prayer to God for His power and protection. The power of the prayer is in the truth of the concept rather than the actual words spoken. We do not believe there is any Biblical support for the idea of

ancestral or generational bondage in the sense of inheriting demons from our ancestors. Therefore, praying some formulaic prayer to undo ancestral demonic ties from the past is unnecessary. We highly discourage any direct conversations with demonic spirits and prefer rather to address God and invite Him to rebuke the spirit (Jude 9).

While we affirm that the bible does not describe a particular methodology for spiritual warfare we also believe there are certain foundational truths that must guide every believer to be victorious in battle against the enemy.

- The enemy is a liar and Jesus is the truth. "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free" (John 8:31-59).
- We must resist the Devil by submitting to God, drawing near to Him, confessing sin, avoiding friendship with the world and humbling ourselves before God (James 4:4-10).
- Not be ignorant of Satan's schemes by our unwillingness to forgive others as we have been forgiven or by harboring anger(2 Cor 2:9-11, Eph 4:26,27).
- Be alert at all times knowing Satan is seeking someone to destroy (I Peter 5:8,9).
- Put on our armor which amounts to understanding, believing and applying the foundational doctrines of our faith (Eph 6:10-20).
- Intercede on behalf of other believers (Eph 6:18).
- Know that from time to time Satan and his army may seek to directly block the mission of the church in unusual ways. In those times it is critical to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, talk directly with God and ask Him to rebuke the enemy (Jude 9, Acts 16:14-18). It is critically important at such times that our focus remains on Jesus and His mission rather than being side-tracked by an unhealthy curiosity toward Satan and his demons.
- Avoid all practices or activities that could be perceived as participation in or sympathetic to demonic practices (I Cor 10).

We believe that balance is the key in spiritual warfare. We must recognize Satan is real and on the attack. However, we must respond to this reality with confidence rather than fear. We must focus our attention on accomplishing the mission that God has given us and ask Him to rebuke the enemy when he gets in the way. We recognize that each circumstance may be different and we must trust God and His Spirit within us to respond correctly according to His leading in the moment. We believe that it should be understood and expected that Christians who are diligent about God's business on earth should expect to be involved in spiritual warfare. However, we also believe that ultimately Satan is a defeated foe and the Church will arise victoriously therefore we seek to live and serve as the victorious Church of Jesus Christ today.