

I. Introduction

- A. There's an account in the gospels where Jesus goes to Peter's house. Peter's mother is sick, and Jesus heals her. Then we read this:
 - 1. *When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick.* (Matthew 8:16)
- B. They brought to him many who were demon-possessed, and he cast out the spirits with a word.
- C. This is not an antiquated, pre-scientific, outmoded way of thinking. It is not human reason, but divine revelation, that helps us know these things are so, and they are still happening today, and they are far more common than most of us realize.
- D. There are four books in the Bible that describe the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These are called the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In the gospels, one of the most frequent things Jesus did was to cast out evil spirits from people who are described as demon-possessed. There are over one hundred examples of this just in the gospels.
- E. Now this verse was originally written in Greek. There is a Greek word that has been translated demon-possessed. That is not a great translation of the Greek word, and many Bible experts are moving away from that term.
- F. The word is simply **daimon-izomai**. The first part does mean demon, an evil spirit. But the second part does not mean possessed. The word simply means **demonized**. Every time I see demon-possessed in my Bible, I simply, in my mind, make it demonized.
- G. I have been asked many times if a Christian can be demon-possessed. My answer is no, never, absolutely not... because to *possess* means to own, and every believer in Jesus Christ has been bought with a price, with the precious blood of Christ. If you are a Christian, you belong to God. He owns you. So no, a true child of God can never be possessed by evil spirits.
- H. But that doesn't tell the whole story.
- I. Because being demonized is a spectrum from very mild to very intense, and we can all be on it.
- J. Scripture is very clear that demons are on the prowl for Christians today.
- K. So we are warned...
 - 1. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Peter 5:8)
- L. This verse is written to Christians about Christians. So are these verses:
 - 1. *Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle [grapple] against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.* (Ephesians 6:11-12)
 - 2. *lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.* (2 Corinthians 2:11)
 - 3. *I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.* (1 Corinthians 10:20)
 - 4. *Neither give place [a foothold] to the devil.* (Ephesians 4:27)
- M. I am saying this because many Christians have been told they cannot be demon possessed, which is true, and they think that gives them a hall pass not to be concerned with spiritual warfare. That is untrue. Even in this small sampling of verses, we discover...
 - 1. Satan still seeks whom he may devour. Satan can gain a foothold in our lives. Satan can grapple with us face to face. Satan can take advantage of us. Satan can lure us into fellowship, a partnership, with him.
- N. So, as your pastor, I have a duty to warn you that even though cannot be possessed by demons or the devil, you can be oppressed by them. You can be afflicted by them. You can be demonized to at least some degree.
 - 1. I have talked to Christians, and I have known Christians, and I have ministered to true believers in the Lord who have been locked in a fierce battle with the dark side. It is serious business and no one is immune.
- O. And I want to quickly say there is VICTORY in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are more than conquerors in his name. His shed blood and glorious resurrection are the reason we can pray, "Do not lead us into temptation, but go on delivering us from the Evil One." Scripture declares that and I've seen that and I know it to be true.

II. Today's Talk

- A. My message today is part 4 in a series. The series is called The Christian in Complete Armor.
- B. Today we are focusing once again on this verse:
 - 1. *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)
- C. So my talk today is called
 - 1. **Casting Down Strongholds, part 2**
 - a) That is because last time, we covered part 1. So let's rewind a little bit and review.

III. What is a Stronghold?

- A. **BATTLEFIELD: A stronghold is a structure of thinking that begins to dominate your mind.**
 - 1. In actual warfare, a stronghold is a high tower to which combatants can run for shelter, and from which they can wage war.
 - 2. In spiritual warfare, a stronghold is a structure of ideas mainly in your mind. Your mind is the battlefield. This is where the war is fought. Once the structure dominates your mind, it will next dominate your emotions. Your psychology will be affected.
 - 3. So Satan works overtime to raise up strongholds across the battlefield of your mind.
 - a) *But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.* (2 Corinthians 11:3)
 - 4. The battlefield is the mind... so you have to guard what you let in.
 - 5. And let me say this. No one is a victim here. This is not a surprise attack.
 - 6. The devil has no power but what you give him. He can't come in the door without your permission. His lies can't come into your mind without your permission. So guard your mind.
- B. **MATRIX: A stronghold is hardened and enlarged when error connects with error and half-truths to form interlocking systems of self-reinforcing lies.**

1. The devil is an architect. In his drawings, he shows an intricate structure of half truth bolted to untruths, welded to supposed truths... veneered with actual truths... and it just keeps getting bigger.
2. In other words, the devil's lies don't just float around in your brain as disconnected bad ideas. Instead, in your mind, the devil's lies actually come together. They actually form bigger lies.
 - a) *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.* (1 Timothy 4:1)
3. Demonic error connects to demonic error which sucks in more demonic error to form a network of interlocking, self-reinforcing lies. An alternative truth-claim that makes you depart from the biblical, Christ-centered truth-claim.
 - a) The devil is all about getting a foothold in your life.
 - b) And once the devil gets a foothold (Eph 4:27) he expands it into a stronghold.
4. Somewhere, in the storage vaults of hell, there are diabolical drawings of demonic structures perfectly architected for you to snap together with a tender soul like yours.

C. DEFINITION - A stronghold is a mindset of defeat that causes me to accept as unchangeable a state of affairs that is contrary to the gracious promises of God.

1. Let me break this one down.
 - a) *A mindset of defeat...* means that the devil has you convinced that the victories, the dreams, the prayers, the ideals that you hope for your life are out of reach. You are a loser. You are a victim.
 - b) This mindset of defeat causes you *to accept something as unchangeable...* This unchangeable quality is a dead giveaway. The devil wants you to believe that you are damaged goods and you will always be this way. Your defeat is unchangeable. Your struggle is unchangeable. Your dysfunction is unchangeable. Your damage is too deep, too big, too strong, too severe to ever find healing.
 - c) So you accept as unchangeable...*a state of affairs that is contrary to the gracious promises of God...* Meaning a stronghold is the devil's way of sneaking a new normal into your consciousness, but it isn't normal, it's subnormal.
2. The devil's new normal makes you less.
 - a) Less joyful. Less happy. Less meaningful. Less loving. Less beloved. Less you.
3. Imagine having a gut full of parasites. There's a giant tapeworm, sapping your energy. So you're never fully alive, never fully energized, never fully yourself... and you think that's just the way it is. To you it's normal.
4. God designed you to soar with the eagles, but you're down here pecking bugs with the chickens... and you think that's just the way it is.
5. So God sent me here today to say wake up!
 - a) *But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew their strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.* (Isaiah 40:31)
6. God sent me here to say it's time for you to tear down the strongholds and mount up with wings like eagles.

IV. The Blind Spot

- A. But, this brings up a really big problem. If the devil has gained a foothold in your life, and grown that foothold into a stronghold, but all this feels normal, then how do you know it's happening?
 1. Normal doesn't raise red flags. Normal doesn't make you call for help. Or ask for prayer.
- B. Everybody has a blind spot right where their stronghold is.
- C. So how do you know there's a stronghold in your life that you need to cast down? How do you identify that you have a stronghold?
- D. I want to give you nine warning signs of strongholds in your life. Nine ways you will feel if the dark side has taken turf on the battlefield of your mind.
 1. And then I'm going to call out some strongholds by name. And then we'll talk about tearing them down... And we will finish with a prayer that I find really powerful.

V. Nine Warning Signs of a Stronghold

A. You feel TEMPTED.

1. A stronghold is always whispering to you that you would do something you know is wrong, unhealthy, or against your conscience.
 - a) *But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.* (James 1:14)
2. When you feel temptation to do that which is wrong, and your conscience starts flashing warning signs... BUT you feel you can't help yourself, and you give in over and over and over again... you might have a stronghold.
3. A stronghold of enticement is always pulling you in a way that your mind says is wrong but your emotions feel is right.

B. You feel HARASSED.

1. *Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.* (1 Peter 5:8)
2. A large portion of your life feels like troubles keep pecking at your life and they never let up.
3. This changes your personality. When you have a stronghold of harassment, all the little things get to you. There are so many, that they add up. So one more little problem hits you, and you overreact. But if someone could see the accumulation of all these little things, it's not overreaction It makes sense to you. But, you go into an altered state. You become cynical. Detached. Cocooned. Your spouse can see it happening in your eyes.
4. The devil harasses you with irritations and pessimism and unbelief and fears and anxieties and threats. There's simply no peace. So therefore, there's a stronghold.

C. You feel TORMENTED

1. Demons are tormentors.

- a) *And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people... came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits...* (Luke 6:17-18)
- b) Different kinds of torment.

(1) Physical torment, Mental torment, Emotional torment, Sexual torment, Identity torment

- 2. God never meant your life to feel like torture. Yes, this fallen world is a morally broken pain machine. But there's armor for that. There's armor that can take the hit. There's armor by which, even in the pain machine, you can thrive.
- 3. But torture? That's the devil's objective, not God's. That's a demonic stronghold, not a divine stronghold.

D. You feel COMPELLED.

- 1. Anything compulsive is a sign of a stronghold, of a demonic area of attack in a person's life. Where you feel out of control. Where you can't help yourself. Where your mind says no, but your will does it anyway.
- 2. It's a stronghold.
 - a) *For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do... But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.* (Romans 7:15-17)
- 3. Wherever you've heard yourself saying, "I couldn't help myself. I couldn't help it." There you have a stronghold.
- 4. Wherever you find yourself triggered by certain things to do certain actions that are broken, there you have a stronghold.
 - a) All addiction is a stronghold. All dysfunction is a stronghold. All compulsion is a stronghold.
- 5. Because a stronghold is Satan's attack on your dominion... his goal is to take you captive to do his will (2 Timothy 2:26).

E. You feel ENSLAVED.

- 1. You commit a sin, say a sexual sin. You confess your sin to God. You remember you are forgiven. You remember you are loved. You remember you are justified and clean before God.
- 2. But then, a minute later, you feel an overwhelming desire to do it again.
 - a) *Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?* (Romans 6:16)
- 3. You feel like you're losing control. And you are, because the enemy has broken through the gates and stolen your dominion.
 - a) Who is the boss of you? What force is running your life?
- 4. God make you to be free, and to feel free, but if you feel enslaved that's a sign of a stronghold.

F. You feel DIRTY.

- 1. You're doing stuff you promised God you would never do. You're crossing lines you thought you would never cross.
- 2. Your mind pictures things that would make you so ashamed if anybody found out.
- 3. Your heart feels emotions and rage and darkness that even shocks yourself.
- 4. And no matter how many times you tell yourself you are forgiven, and powerful, and clean you still feel defiled. That's a stronghold.
- 5. Jesus said,
 - a) *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a person.* (Mark 7:21-23)
- 6. In this category, I include self-rejection, self-pity, and a victim mentality.

G. You feel REBELLIOUS.

- 1. I'm calling this what it is. When a Christian takes God's Word, and sets their own opinions above God's Word, that is rebellion.
 - a) *Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.* (Hebrews 3:15)
- 2. You harden your heart against God, and give yourself permission to go your own way instead of his way. When you give yourself permission to tell God he is wrong, it means you have already welcomed a pandora's box of gremlins inside the walls of your soul.
- 3. Do you realize how many Christians have hardened their hearts against God so much, and disobey his word so much, that going to church, and reading the Bible, and serving God, and praying... all of that is becoming a tiny speck in the rearview mirror.
- 4. Covid has really sifted the church... and one third of Christians has said they are not coming back to church and will not raise their kids in church.
 - a) *Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.* (1 Samuel 15:23)
- 5. It is a stronghold of Satan. And I'm going to throw into this category Pride. If you're thinking... wow, all those messed up people out there with all those strongholds... I thank God I'm not like them... There's your sign.

H. You feel HOPELESS/DESPERATE/DONE

- 1. That spirit is not from God.
 - a) *For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.* (2 Timothy 1:7)
- 2. I say this with all the tenderness and with all the firmness I can. I want you to know that any voice trying to drive you to end your life, or to destroy another life, or to do anything harmful to yourself or others... that voice is not from God, and it is not even from you. You're being lied to. It is a voice from the dark side, a whisper of Satan, and it is a stronghold of demonic ideation that must and can be cast down with the mighty weapons of God.
- 3. There is another voice — the voice from heaven, the voice of truth — that has to grow louder, and it is the voice constantly saying, "Don't give up, and never quit, because all things are possible with God."

I. You feel BITTERLY ANGRY.

1. There is a holy anger and an unholy anger. And the unholy kind is chronic. It's always there. Sometimes simmering. Sometimes blowing up.
 - a) *Looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness [unresolved anger] springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled.* (Hebrews 12:15)
2. Unholy anger is displaced anger... you're mad at someone from your past, but taking it out on someone in your present.
3. Unholy anger is disproportionate anger... the punishment is too great for the crime.
4. Unholy anger is damaging anger... because it injures your relationships, it pushes away the people trying to love you, and it leeches your joy away.
 - a) This is a demonic stronghold. This is that root of bitterness that defiles many. It is letting the sun go down on your wrath, opening up that foothold for the devil, and hanging on to the anger as the foothold becomes a stronghold.

VI. Not Normal

- A. When you feel tempted, harassed, tormented, compelled, enslaved, dirty, rebellious, hopeless, or angry a lot — it means you've taken some hits in the battle, and there is a wound in your soul that the devil has taken advantage of. The demons are swarming like flies. But you are oblivious to all of that because to you, it's just your normal.
- B. It is not normal. It is a wearisome, worrisome, unwholesome way of walking in this world.
- C. But, good news...
 1. *For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)
- D. Before we go to work pulling them down, I'd like to call out some common strongholds by name.
 1. **The Stronghold of Adultery** — a greater commitment to sex outside of marriage than to God and his commands.
 2. **The Stronghold of Apathy/Indifference** — Among God's people, so very few are eternity conscious. We are position conscious, possession conscious, power conscious, personality conscious, but eternity conscious? Christ conscious? The spirit of stupor and the stronghold of apathy has taken hold of the people of God.
 3. **The Stronghold of Worldliness** — this is compromise, this is accommodation to the spirit of the age and a desire to fit in.
 4. **The Stronghold of Depression/Despair/Defeat** — there is no hope for me.
 5. **The Stronghold of Anxiety** — the devil has so diminished God in your thinking that your problems are bigger than he is.
 6. **The Stronghold of Materialism/Greed/Financial Angst** — a greater commitment to feathering your own nest than to helping lost people find and follow God.
 7. **The Stronghold of Bad Attitude/Narcissism** — because it's all about you and your family.
 8. **The Stronghold of Victimhood** — instead of taking one hundred percent responsibility for the quality of your life, you blame God and others for your unhappiness.
 9. **The Stronghold of Disappointment** — which is being more committed to your expectations than to the will and ways of God.
 10. **The Stronghold of Entitlement** — the delusion that somebody owes you, and that you can make a living off the sweat of another person's brow.
- E. Christian, you are a soldier of the Cross. You have weapons. You are invincible. But these strongholds make you a casualty. These strongholds let the Enemy of your soul into your soul and give him a base of operations.
 1. By them, Satan either wounds you so deeply you need the MASH unit, or he distracts you so persistently you forget to fight the fight.
- F. It's time to expel Satan from his influence over you, and time to tear down the strongholds. When they brought to Jesus people who were demonized, he cast out the demons with a word. Because when the demons go, the strongholds crumble. Jesus is still doing that today, so let's ask him to do it here, for us, right now. I'm going to invite you to pray for yourself. And then afterward, if you need more prayer, I'm going to invite you to come and receive that prayer from our prayer time... in a few minutes.

VII. Prayer

- A. Dear Father
 1. I come to you now for mercy and for strength. Mercy to forgive my sins. Strength to set me free. You see the battle I am in, and you know where I have fallen down. I confess to you, Lord God, that given the devil a foothold.
 - a) [Name a couple of areas where you have given in to temptation.]
 2. Lord, I am sorry for these sins. I repent of these footholds and the sins that caused them.
 3. And right now, I tear down every stronghold.
 - a) Specifically I cast down the Stronghold/s of... [name them here.]
 4. I bring every thought into captivity that I may walk in obedience to Christ.
 - a) I turn away from bitterness and grudges. I turn away from hatred. I turn away from rebellion against you. I renounce the devil and all his works. I turn away from all occult practices.
 5. Now Lord, I come against any evil, and against any spirit in me that occupies any area of my personality.
 6. I will not make peace with them. I will not compromise with them. I say they have no place in me.
 7. And the only spirit I permit in my life is your Holy Spirit, dear God.
 8. In the authority and power of Jesus and his shed blood, I tear down the strongholds. I command all other spirits to flee.
 9. And I ask you Jesus, say the word, and set me free.

VIII. Prayer

- A. I will now close in prayer. This is a great start. But the devil keeps looking for an opening, so next time, we have to start gearing up, and wearing the armor of God.