

Strongholds

1. This morning we are going to talk about our 6th S: Strongholds.
2. I want to start off telling you about a remarkable thing that Jesus did in a town called Bethany, just outside of Jerusalem.
 - a. John 11:38-44 *“So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, “Remove the stone.” Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, “Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days.” 40 Jesus said to her, “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?” 41 So they removed the stone. Then Jesus raised His eyes, and said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. 42 “I knew that You always hear Me; but because of the people standing around I said it, so that they may believe that You sent Me.” 43 When He had said these things, He cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” 44 The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”*
 - b. His friend Lazarus had died, and was buried. Dead 4 days in fact by the time Jesus got to the scene. He tells Lazarus’s sister, Martha, to open the grave by rolling away the stone. She replies, *“But Lord, by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”*
 - i. But Jesus tells her to believe and she will see the glory of God.
 - ii. So they take away the stone and Jesus commands Lazarus to come out of the grave.
 - iii. The bible says that Lazarus came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen and a cloth around his face.
 - iv. Then Jesus says something that is central to our message this morning: *“Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go’”*)
 - c. Lazarus couldn’t walk around with the clothes of a dead man. He was no longer dead, he was now alive.
 - i. And the lesson for you and I is that we can’t walk around in the clothes of a dead man either.
 - ii. I will tell you something that will embarrass my wife a little bit.
 1. She has no sense of smell.
 2. So when she wears a suit coat or sweater she has to ask me to “smell it” to make sure it is wearable for another day.
 3. Imagine if I lied to her and let her wear something that had an odor to it?
 4. You can vividly imagine the reactions of the people she would have contact with during the course of her day. The wary looks, the waving over their noses after she walks by, the avoidance by her co-workers.
 5. Funny thing, she would be oblivious to it. Not even realizing what the problem is.
 6. Now, I would never let Jennifer be put in that situation. I smile and laugh as I give her clothes a “whiff” to be sure they are safe for the day.
 - d. But there are many of us who are walking around with clothes that stink a whole lot worse than from a little bit of perspiration and body odor.
 1. When you and I placed our faith in Christ, we died.
 2. Our old man died, our old life died; we died to our past and to our sin.
 3. God gave His Holy Spirit to us and made us alive. He literally raised us to life; spiritual and eternal life.
 - ii. We exchanged our old way of life for a new way of life.

- iii. Our dead spirits became alive as God's Spirit came into us and united us to God.
- iv. But as wonderful as that sounds, while it happened in the spiritual realm, it has not yet fully been lived out in our physical realm.
 - 1. There are many of us who are wearing the clothes of their old person, the one who was put to death with Christ...
 - 2. Some of us never got rid of our grave clothes.
 - 3. Some of us got comfortable with them because that is what we wore before we met Christ.
 - 4. But we don't realize that those old grave clothes smell of death instead of life.
 - 5. It is for that reason that our lives don't make an impact upon other people.
 - 6. We don't realize that we are pushing people away from Christ because of the odor of death that we are carrying around
 - 7. But Jesus tells us that **we must "take off the grave clothes" in order to go on in life.**
- e. God's purpose for the Christian is to be wearing the clothes of Christ, of the new man, to put off the works of the flesh and put on Christ and to learn to walk by the Spirit.
- f. Do you want to walk in the clothes of the redeemed?
 - i. Do you want to give off the sweet smell of life?
 - ii. Then listen carefully to this message on strongholds.

3. What is a biblical stronghold?

- a. *"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."*
2 Cor. 10:4,5
- b. The pirate castles of the Mediterranean Sea during Roman times.
 - i. The word for "strongholds" is used only this one time in the New Testament. It is a word that was used to describe the pirate castles of Celicia in the Mediteranan Sea, Paul used a war from the recent history of his native Cilicia to illustrate our spiritual warfare. This was a very dramatic episode of its history and he would have known it well. There had been a longstanding and growing pirate problem.
 - ii. Palestine was the food basket of Rome and the supply ships had to go past the rocky Cilician cliffs.
 - 1. The pirates had high rock forts (120 of them) called STRONGHOLDS (the same word Paul uses in this passage). They would come out of the strongholds, raid the ships, steal the food and retreat back to their secure stronghold high up on the cliffs.
 - 2. All the efforts to defeat them on sea failed. Even after successful skirmishes their bases were intact and secure and the root of the problem had not been touched.
 - 3. There was by 67 BC an army of 10,000 Pirates that had brought Rome to its knees by cutting off its supplies. They had their foot on the neck of Rome. The problem was urgent and could not be avoided. It was Rome's major problem.
 - 4. Rome's normal approach to warfare failed, their weapons ineffective, because this was a different kind of army- more of a 'underground' gorilla operation. The problem was so serious that the Senate commissioned top general Pompey to deal with the problem.
 - iii. They offered him whatever he needed and gave him 3 years to fix it.
 - iv. So he designed and built special MIGHTY WEAPONS to attack their bases rather than the individual pirates.

1. These were ships with huge grappling hooks that he sent in 11 directions to attack the strongholds.
 2. They catapulted the hooks up onto the cliffs to PULL DOWN THE STRONGHOLDS.
 3. The Roman fleet did not go after the pirate ships - instead every stronghold built in proud defiance against Rome was pulled down into the sea. Meanwhile Roman soldiers were positioned to capture any fleeing pirates.
 4. They brought them into captivity to the obedience of Rome, Most surrendered and came into obedience.
 5. Those who did not were punished (killed) for their disobedience.
 6. The Pirates were overwhelmed and had no answer to these mighty weapons, which were specifically designed for pulling down the strongholds. In just 3 months Pompey had totally defeated the pirates.
- v. The only way to get a permanent solution was to pull down their strongholds, rather than try fight all the pirates individually.
4. What does this have to do with personal strongholds?
- a. Most of us don't understand the nature of a stronghold when it comes to evil.
 - i. We become a Christian and get forgiven of sin and then think that our troubles will vanish.
 - ii. The truth is that the troubles are just beginning.
 - iii. God's light shines into our lives and illuminates the dark corners and recesses of our lives.
 - iv. All of the closets and the cupboards and secret rooms of our lives are unlocked, one by one, and the light of God's love and truth illuminate them.
 - v. We begin seeing all of the areas of our lives that are out of alignment with God and begin a flurry of activity to either get them in line or we stuff them into another closet.
 - b. **But God doesn't want to just clean up the rooms of our lives.**
 - i. **He wants to change the source of the mess.**
 - ii. It is for this reason that we are told in our passage that God's weapons go after the strongholds and the enemy's base of operation in our lives rather than after the symptoms of our troubles.
 1. We can fight against temptation all day long, and will never stop fighting.
 2. Fight this temptation, fight that temptation. Win this, lose that. But the war never stops.
 3. **Because God's method of winning is to destroy the base of operations.**
 - a. That is the 'old man' is put to death.
 - b. We don't fight the battle on the enemy's terms. Because as long as he has a base of operations to return to, we can pretty much forget about victory.
5. So how do we destroy the stronghold? How do we tear down the base of operations?
- a. First, let us examine exactly what a stronghold in a human being's life.
 - i. In v. 5 Paul says "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."
 - ii. He is saying that a stronghold is a house of thoughts.
 1. **A stronghold is a belief system that influences our behavior and controls our lives.**
 2. Everything that we believe affects our actions.
 3. Many of you voted this past week based upon what you believed about the issues and the candidates.
 4. Every choice you make comes from a belief in a set of facts.

5. The more solidly built the information, the more solidly stern we stand upon our beliefs and act upon them with firm resolve.
 - iii. Imagine, however, that you voted for someone this past week and discovered this week that the information you had concerning that person was false or erroneous.
 1. How would that affect you?
 2. You would certainly feel betrayed, maybe even feel as if you had been brainwashed.
 3. I recently heard a story about a Russian tour guide in the former Soviet Union. She had been raised to be a devout communist from her childhood. She believed Marxism to be the best in the world. Likewise, she believed what she had been told that the people in the west lived in poverty, much worse than the scarcity and deprivation that she and her countrymen endured on a daily basis. Then she had the opportunity to go to London on a trip sponsored by her government. Arriving late at night, she needed some groceries and went to a local store. As she walked in through the door of the supermarket she was shocked to see the vast array of all sorts of foods, stacked floor to ceiling, all of it priced cheaply and all of it fresh. Suddenly she says, "I knew I had believed a lie."
 - a. This lie that she had believed was a house of thoughts...a stronghold, a belief system that had influenced and controlled her life.
 - b. The truth had caused it to crash down, along with her faith in communism.
 - b. In Romans 12:2 we are told "*Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*"
 - i. **Truth is the weapon that God gives us to demolish strongholds.**
 - ii. Truth is divinely powerful to demolish strongholds, and to take down arguments and pretensions that rise up against the knowledge (experience) of God
 - iii. God uses truth to destroy the fortress of lies the old man's power is built upon.
6. But truth isn't very popular nowadays.
- a. We live in an age where we hear people saying, "what is truth" or "whose truth"?
 - b. **Truth from God's perspective is not subjective. It is concrete and eternal.**
 - i. Truth, like God, does not change with the times.
 - ii. I want you to also realize that truth is not a set a facts. It is a person. It is Jesus Christ.
 - iii. He embodies the totality of truth. Surrender to Him and you will find the truth that sets you free. He himself said in John 8:32 "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.*"
 - iv. I wonder if you are seeing how these verses tie together.
 1. Do you see the word "free" there at the end of that verse?
 2. That is what happens when strongholds are destroyed.
 3. You experience the liberation of being free from any control other than Christ.
 4. You don't have to be controlled by alcohol, by anger, by lust, by food, by depression, by debt, by cigarettes, by drugs, by anything!!!
7. The absence of truth – what does it lead to?
- a. I read an article about how in the former Soviet Union, when a person comes to Christ, most churches have that person not only receive Christ, but also renounce Satan, magic arts, horoscopes, witchcraft and an assortment of other practices that are extremely prevalent in their society.
 - i. Funny, we don't do that. Maybe we ought to...
 - b. You would be surprised to find out how much of our lives are influenced by the occult and by forces opposed to God's reign in our world.

- i. You only need to turn on your television during the Halloween season to see that 9 out of 10 movies on TV for an entire week deal with the occult, and glorify its practice.
 - 1. Vampires...and vampirism...once a subject of movies with Boris Karloff were scary and funny, but no longer.
 - 2. Do a Google search on “Vampire Message Boards” and you will find thousands, not hundreds of people who actually believe that they ARE vampires.
 - 3. There are thousands of adherents to other forms of occult practices that believe that they actually are some animal, but temporarily in a human form, and that they can “shift” back and forth from human form to their animal form at will.
 - a. These folks don’t just pretend that they are these animals, they actually believe they are.
 - 4. These folks are just a representative speck of a huge segment of our society that has become enthralled by the occult and the lies that Satan wishes to tie them into bondage with.
 - 5. You and I look at this folks and we say, “How can they believe this?” We are amazed at the audacity and bizarreness of the lie they are believing! How can anyone believe such stuff? But they can...because a stronghold of lies exists.

- c. But before you go “whew, at least I’m not involved in any of that stuff”, let me say that you do not have to be actively involved with the occult to have a stronghold in your life.
 - i. I believe that ANY lie that we believe from Satan can become a stronghold.
 - ii. How about believing lies about yourself.
 - 1. Do you believe that you are worthless? That you are of little value?
 - 2. **These are impregnable fortresses of false beliefs that will as surely take away the plans that God has for you in the same way that the pirates of the Med. Stole cargos of ships.**

- d. **This is deception is at the root of a stronghold.**
 - i. Let me try to illustrate this.
 - 1. You might have an anger problem. Does that mean you have an anger stronghold?
 - 2. No...it means that the anger is pointing to a lie in your life that you believe.
 - 3. **The deceptive belief system is the stronghold.**
 - a. I have seen folks who are angry with a parent who is long deceased.
 - b. They felt as if they were deprived of something, or they are angry because they were injured or hurt at some point by that person.
 - c. They feel worthless or powerless or fearful every time they encounter something that reminds them of how they felt the first time they were hurt.
 - d. They lash out at their current circumstance or at the people around them as if they were the original ones causing the hurt.
 - i. The lie may be that they have a right to collect a debt they are owed.
 - ii. The lie may be that they “don’t deserve to be treated this way.”
 - iii. The lie may be that they have a right to be in control.
 - iv. Threaten those feelings and anger pours out like a Mt. St. Helens eruption.
 - ii. **But** disarm that lie with the truth and the anger will be disarmed.
 - 1. Its fortress will be gone, it can no longer attack because its base of operation is destroyed.
 - 2. Just trying to learn anger management is not enough. (that is like trying to attack the raiding pirate ships).

- a. We need to not only control our symptoms (which is like trying to wash our grave clothes) but rather we need to get at the source and disarm its power over us. Put on new clothes!

- 8. How do the strongholds get started?
 - a. Toehold - foothold - stronghold
 - b. Most of us who are history buffs know that on June 6th, 1944, Allied forces took the cliffs and beaches at Normandy. Two Panzer Divisions were 60 miles away and were delayed by Hitler who believed the attack would be elsewhere. By the time he released those divisions to join the fight, Allied forces had more than a foothold, they had a stronghold at Normandy. It was too late to push them back into the sea.
 - c. When we believe a lie from Satan, we act upon it. That forms the a toehold.
 - i. Just like a rock climber who only needs a tiny crack to get a finger into or a little ½ inch ledge to get a toe onto and he can lift himself up.
 - d. When we resist the truth, we allow that lie to form a foothold.
 - e. When we continue to believe that lie or allow other lies to build upon it, we let a stronghold form. The longer it festers, the stronger it gets.
 - i. Not unlike one who begins to smoke...I remember saying...I won't get addicted, I can quit anytime. I said that for years. Too many years until I discovered I was addicted beyond my ability to quit.

- 9. Why do we have to fight this battle!
 - a. The journey we are on is not just a battle but a campaign, that is the translation of the word "warfare." It is a war that is ongoing.
 - b. Now some of you may say, "When Christ triumphed over the Cross, I thought He won the victory...why am I still fighting it?"
 - i. Satan, not unlike Saddam Hussein, even after being beaten in the first Gulf war, acted as if he had triumphed, and terrorized the entire world for years after his defeat. It was as if he was the only one who didn't know he had been beaten.
 - ii. Satan is still conducting psy-ops warfare. He no longer can hold us hostage in physical bondage, but he tries to get us to believe lies so as to willingly become his hostages again.
 - c. God's perfect plan for you and I is to experience intimacy with Himself.
 - i. Satan does not want you and I to experience that because when we do, we will also advance God's kingdom and rescue others who are Satan's hostages.
 - ii. We must learn to pull down anything, any false belief that is keeping us from knowing more about Christ, from understanding Him and from obeying Him. Our goal is to stay connected with God.
 - iii. Satan doesn't want that. That is the arena of victory for Christians. Staying connected in an intimate way with God.
 - 1. So Satan will tell you lies about yourself...like you aren't good enough, faithful enough, holy enough. He will toss stuff from your past to make you feel unqualified. He will even lie to you and tell you that God can't use you because you have failed in some area of your life.
 - 2. Those are the lies that must be struck down with the truth.

- 10. Lets look at the two things we must do to get free and remain free:
 - a. **Step I: Pull down the stronghold with the truth. (God's word).**
 - i. This is the vital reason why you and I need Bible Study, both in a small group setting as well as individually.
 - ii. You will not pull down strongholds with your willpower.

1. The passage we read said with “*Divinely powerful weapons*”
2. If you try to do it with the weapons of the world, that is, willpower, techniques, etc. you will fail.
- iii. Strongholds only fall when confronted with the truth.
 1. Think about this... When we preach Christ, the Word pulls down the strongholds of Satan in their minds so that they can believe in Christ (their thoughts then come into obedience of Christ).
 2. The divinely powerful Gospel pulls down the basic beliefs opposing Christ from which their wrong thoughts proceed preventing them from receiving the blessing of salvation.

b. Step II: Bring into captivity every thought (noema) to the obedience of Christ.

- i. Noema are the thoughts that flow from our basic convictions and beliefs. That is, they flow from our strongholds. The thoughts are the pirates.
- ii. Once the stronghold is destroyed, the pirates, the thoughts are easily conquered and placed into obedience.
- iii. But what we too often try to do is to conquer the thoughts (the pirates) without destroying their base of operations.
- iv. We fail, fail and fail again...and then we give up...until like the Romans we find ourselves running out of food because it is all being stolen...and we get mad enough to do something about it.

Are you mad enough to do something about your captivity to the pirates of your life? Have you had it with being robbed of your joy and your peace by Satan and his lies? Have you been battling against the pirates and been letting their strongholds remain?

You can let that all be changed today. If God’s truth has touched you, if the lies and the habits of your life have been challenged today, don’t sit still. Come forward during our time of prayer and surrender them to Christ. Don’t let anything come in the way of your freedom.

God wants the bastions of pride in your life to come to an end. He wants to break them. He wants to break you. Will you do anything to be free? Surrender today. Give yourself to Jesus. He said, “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

Lets pray:

Some of the shepherds and myself will be here to pray with you. Now is the day to be free. Wont you cast off the graveclothes and be free.