

Discovering the Spiritual Dimension

WINNING THE REAL BATTLE

Matthew 16:13-20

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Little Billy was playing at the neighbors when the phone rang. After a while, his friend's mother walked into the room and said, *"Billy, that was your mother on the phone."* Before she said anything more, Billy started crying and ran out the door for home. *"That's really rotten, Mom,"* Billy's friend said, *"His mom promised him he could stay the afternoon."* The friend's mother responded, *"I was going to tell him that his mom said he could stay overnight."*

Have you ever jumped the gun like Billy? Billy's assumptions got in the way of reality. His beliefs misled him. Instead of celebrating, he cried. How often do we misread situations?

There are thousands of books, video tapes, and seminars on marriage. We've never had more resources and more skilled counselors than now, yet the divorce rate in Olmsted County still remains at 50 percent. Why aren't the presence and use of all these resources chiseling that divorce rate down? Is there something more than psychological principles affecting our marriages? Is it possible that there is more to marriage than communication and negotiation skills? Are there unseen forces at work? How about in alcohol and drug addiction? After decades of programs to help people with alcohol and

to steer youth away from drugs, the problems remain formidable. Why so little headway?

Is it possible that the situation is more complex than we think? Do we hastily misread our world?

There is an example of some believers doing that in the Bible. Job was a man of integrity. When he was plunged into pain and loss, both he and his friends misread his situation. They all thought God was responsible. The friends sought to justify God at Job's expense, but life was more complicated than they thought. At one point Job thought God was his enemy. He did so because he was ignorant of that invisible dimension. The Bible teaches about an unseen dimension influencing our lives. It speaks of an invisible struggle that *affects us*, and that we can *affect*.

Many of us are uncomfortable with this idea. We don't care to explore it. The idea of cosmic combat or spiritual warfare conjures up images, for many of us, of *The Exorcist* and other spooky movies. It brings to mind superstitious, creepy people who engage in all kinds of eccentric practices. Spiritual warfare evokes anxiety in us because we don't want to get caught up in something irrational. We don't want to lose control of our senses and sanity. That's the first reason many of us would rather stay uninformed about spiritual warfare. We are afraid that we'll get caught up in something cultic, aberrant and irrational.

A second reason comes from living in a society and culture that has taught us that nothing in this world can be attributed to the activity of anything spiritual. We've been told that the earth was produced by a series of **material** changes that required no intervention from God. Those we trust to explain our world attribute nothing to the activity of angels, demons or God. To even suggest that one explore those possibilities is

seen as the abandonment of reason. We hesitate to consider spiritual warfare because we fear rejection from those we respect.

We Christian believers have a problem, however. Although most of us were raised with a secular view of the world, the person we call Lord and teacher did not share that secular perspective. Jesus had a spiritual view and operated in that spiritual view. Jesus believed in the reality and influence of angels on our life and world. He spoke of them often. He taught about fallen angels, and he commanded fallen angels to release their hold on people. When he did that, people were healed. There are 41 different instances of healing in the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They are recorded in 75 different passages. Sometimes Jesus healed an individual and sometimes a crowd of people. In more than one fourth of those healings he expels demons. The gospels present a human being, anointed by God, who healed the sick and the lame, raised the dead, multiplied food, walked on water, calmed storms and drove out demons. Jesus said that he would anoint his followers with the same spirit and power to continue the work. Do you believe that?

For the past two hundred years, Western believers have mostly responded in two ways. Some have joined German theologian Rudolf Bultmann and others in seeing these supernatural reports of the Bible as fictitious story-telling that came from the recesses of pre-scientific minds. As believers they maintain that they are valuable stories because they illustrate some truth about God and his work among us. Many clergy today have difficulty believing in angels, devils and miracles, unless you are talking about the miracles of nature (such as birth, faith and love). Their sermons are about how God works within nature and within our nature. Miracles are always talked about in terms of

the marvels of the human body, the wonders of nature and love. You'll never hear the word devil or demon unless they are spoken figuratively... because nothing that matters is attributed to angels, demons or direct, divine intervention. These believers share no recent stories of multiplying food, disappearing tumors, stilled storms, or tortured souls delivered because they don't believe it ever happened; and thus, we shouldn't expect it to happen.

The second group of believers, I was part of. We affirmed that all these things happened as described in the Bible. We also railed against those who didn't think it happened. *We are the believers, they are the skeptics,* we reasoned. However, we weren't that different. We didn't expect to heal or free people from demons anymore than they did. We assumed that we were living in a different stage of history when the things reported in the Bible weren't as needed. Consequently, the only type of spiritual warfare I had been exposed to was my personal struggle with temptations.

About 17 years ago, God began a lengthy conversion process in my heart and life. It is still continuing. I became convinced that I like little Billy had been missing much of what really is happening. As I walked with people who took spiritual warfare seriously, I found this Bible coming alive in ways I had never imagined. I found myself praying more frequently and insightfully, and I witnessed people really getting help. I realized that I had been a follower who had missed much of the power, much of the wonder and much of the benefit of Jesus's point of view.

My goal this fall is to introduce you to Jesus's personal view of the world, and then, using his example, provide you with practical helps that will equip you to make a difference. The insights gained will help you make a difference in your marriage and

family life, in your business and friendships, in this community and in the world God=s calls you to serve.

We witness Jesus=s point of view graphically in Matthew 16. When Peter confessed to Jesus that he was the Messiah, Jesus offered Peter an incredible vision. He said:

You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. (Matthew 16:18-19)

Jesus saw the world shrouded and bound by the powers of death, deception, destruction, the rule of Hades. He saw us human beings suffering in a darkened prison camp. He saw your mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, brothers, sisters, children, grandchildren, and you yourself struggling in a death camp. Locked within its great walls, confined not by an iron curtain, but rather a demonic one, all need deliverance. Jesus promised Peter that the gates of this prison would not keep us in. *Al=m giving you the keys, @ he said, Aand you will unlock those gates and lead people to freedom. You will actually bind powers on earth and they'll become imprisoned in the spiritual world. What you loose in the visible realm will be unleashed spiritually. @* Jesus wasn't being obscure. Peter had been seeing spiritual powers affect people; and he saw Jesus bind those powers and free people from their bondage.

Our mission at Bethany is a command: *Go and bring people to faith and freedom in Jesus Christ.* When we wrote that mission statement, we had spent months in prayer, Bible study and discussions pondering Christ's call for us as a church. Unveiled to us was the great need of humanity and Christ's call for us to unlock the gates of Hades. The

promise Jesus gave us is that the gates of this worldwide death camp won't prevail over us. We'll get them open. People will experience freedom. We've been given the keys.

In your marriage, family, business and personal health, are you reading the situation correctly? Are you seeing all that is influencing you? Are your eyes open to every dimension of reality? Will you let Christ open your eyes to the dimension he sees?

Christ awaits your choice. You can stop and listen or turn away like Billy and run.

Which will it be?