

Uncovering Spiritual Aims

Winning the Real Battle

Matthew 4:1-11
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Bethany Church
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Every now and then, I receive an interesting commentary on our state, usually from the perspective of Californians; however, Tom Warnke, who is with the Agricultural Services Department of the University of Minnesota offered this vision of us (I will read just a few of his observations). He writes:

YOU MIGHT BE MINNESOTAN IF...

- ü *you believe rushing out on the lakes with your pick-up in November is nature's way of upgrading the state's gene pool;*
- ü *you instinctively walk like a penguin for three months out of the year;*
- ü *you keep snow tires on your truck all year because it isn't worth taking them off for only two months;*
- ü *you think of SPAM as a quality, all-purpose meat product whether served with eggs for breakfast, in a sandwich at noontime, or in a hot-dish for supper;*
- ü *the first time you saw "Grumpy Old Men" you thought it was a documentary;*
- ü *your dog dies, your spouse leaves you, you lose your job, and your car breaks down, all on the same day, and the first thought that comes to your mind is "It could be worse."*

This tongue and cheek description of us here reveals that there definitely are some common traits that develop because of our life together. We spoke about that a week ago as we considered the materialistic view of the world in which we were raised. We grew

up in a world where no authority attributed any physical change to spiritual causes. We tend to **SEE** everything in terms of physics, biology and psychology. We by nature are suspicious of reports involving angels, demons or miracles of God, and we quickly dismiss any practitioner associated with those things as a charlatan or at best, a fool. Even as we can say “You might be Minnesotan if,” we also can say “You might be an American (or a Westerner) if you’re suspicious of the spiritual. It’s how we’ve been raised.

My perspective changed because of three things. I increasingly was exposed to Jesus’ point of view. I experienced a new reality as I walked with believers operating from Jesus’ viewpoint. I experimented with Jesus’ practices and found them valid. There was no way anyone could argue me into seeing things the way Jesus saw them. All people could do was point to his perspective in Scripture and offer me their hands of friendship as they walked with his vision.

In this series, we will examine Jesus’ view of the world, the things he did as a result of that view, and the practical ways we can follow his example. You will find this immensely helpful if you dedicate yourself to becoming familiar with Christ’s perspective and test for yourself his practices.

As a Jew, Jesus looked at life through the lens of the Hebrew Bible. The foundation of his vision is Genesis, chapter one.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule... (Genesis 1:26-28, NIV)

Jesus understood that we not only were made by God, but also like God. We were created to be like God. We were made in His image. We were made to be companions that cared like God, loved like God, lived like God and ruled like God. Because Jesus

understood that this earth is **OUR DOMINION**, our God-given dominion as human beings, and because Jesus like us was human, he exercised authority. When I read the New Testament, two things stand out. I'm amazed at Jesus' partnership with God and his authority. He claims partnership everywhere he speaks, and he speaks with authority. He acts with authority. He behaves as if he actually has dominion. The gospels report:

The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. (Matt 7:28-29, NIV)

When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men. (Matthew 9:8, NIV)

The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching-- and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." (Mark 1:27, NIV)

The word *authority* appears 5 times in the gospel of John, 11 times in the gospel of Matthew, 10 times in Mark's short gospel, and 17 times in the gospel of Luke. However, the notion of authority is even more pervasive. For example, we overhear this conversation in scriptures:

"Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples. In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him." (Luke 8:25, NIV)

Three things must be observed about the gospel record. *First*, the people, who encountered Christ, had *never witnessed this kind of partnership with God*; *second*, they *never expected this kind of authority from a man*. *Third*, Christ never attributes his *authority to being divine*. Although at the time of his death he acknowledges he is the Son of God, he continually refers to himself as the "son of man" (especially as he is questioned about his authority). That's no accident.

God gave humanity dominion when they were created, and there is no record in the Bible of God taking it back. Therefore, if God is not grabbing dominion away from us, who is? Why do we, who've been given authority over this earth, become helpless

victims in it? Who's exercising dominion when we find ourselves struggling with addictions? Who's exercising dominion when despite our intentions and efforts to have an intimate marriage, we grow estranged. Who's exercising dominion when our homes become places of tantrums and tears? Who is exercising dominion when we find ourselves battling allergies, arthritis or myriads of other human ailments? We drive carefully only to be broadsided by an inattentive driver. We hook up our computer, stereo and television one day and the next they are fried by a lightning bolt. Who is exercising dominion?

A spiritual battle for dominion is recorded in Matthew, chapter four. The conflict is summed up in three temptations.

Temptation #1: If you're the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread (Matthew 4:3). Just before this period of fasting and temptation, God had affirmed Jesus at his baptism as His beloved son. The devil is saying, "*Oh really, are you sure? Prove it.*" Using the vulnerability of Jesus' hunger and loneliness, the devil tempts Jesus to act out of doubt rather than faith. If Jesus speaks to the stone, who's guiding him? Who's orchestrating what's happening? Who is exercising dominion? The devil is doing two things. *He is seeking to loosen Jesus' trust in God's love and divide the partnership; and, he's trying to gain dominion by manipulating and deceiving Jesus.*

Temptation #2: If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, "He will command his angels to protect you" (Matthew 4:6). The devil is saying, "*So, your hunger tells us that you're staking your life on God's word? Fine, then really prove it. Here we are at the top of God's holy temple in Jerusalem. If there is any place that God would act on your behalf and protect you as his child, certainly it would be at his temple, wouldn't it? If you really are God's child and you stake your life on his word, prove it. His word says that he'll protect you. So stake your life on God's word and don't just fast, jump!*" Satan cleverly weaves an intricate web as he attacks Jesus' trust in the word of God. If Jesus fails to jump, Satan sows doubt in God's word. If Jesus

jumps, Satan, by trickery, has just exercised dominion through Jesus and quite possibly destroyed his life. *Satan's aim: subvert Jesus' trust in God and exercise dominion through him.* Jesus' response is to hear God fully before acting.

Temptation #3: You can have it all, the whole world, its power, money, prestige if you look to me (Matthew 4:8-9). Satan is saying, “Okay, you trust God, but look at this spectacular world, isn't it wonderful? I'll give it to you. Just offer me a little of the honor you've given God.” Satan tells Jesus that he can play both camps and win. “Keep honoring God, but also honor me,” he tells Jesus. Satan tries to shift Jesus' trust with the allure of money and power. He again seeks to erode Jesus' trust in God's love and then exercise dominion over Jesus.

Can you see through these temptations how we separate from God, how we lose dominion becoming pawns that wound and victimize one another and destroy ourselves? We think the enemy is our boss, our job, our parent, our spouse, our government, a bully in school. We don't recognize the hidden battle. We don't think of the underlying aims. Satan attacks where we are vulnerable: our hunger, our isolation, our pain, our hurt, our confusion. His aims always are to undermine our confidence in God's love and exercise dominion through us. In contrast, God's aim is to restore us fully as partners and rulers.

Now God is almighty, and Satan is just one of his rebellious creatures. Satan's greatest power is in his deception. So, what's happening with you? Is your trust in God eroding or growing? If you want God as your partner, there's no trickery involved.

First, recognize God's love for you in Christ. You are so loved. *Second*, acknowledge that you've been a pawn of Satan through your choices. You've harmed many and are guilty. Confess your sin and receive forgiveness. *Third*, get to know God's voice.

Partner with people who trust Christ and seek to hear and obey his voice in Scripture.

Fourth, look at your marriage, business, health, and community in view of the spiritual aims we discussed. Like it or not you were born into this battle. You can't choose the battle, but you can choose which side you're on; and you can choose to win!