

Sermon- Spiritual Warfare Mind Games

Scripture: John 7:20-24

Sunday, May 27, 2018

A certain company had 200 applications for an interview. They needed to find the right candidate from all those applicants. In the end it all boiled down to this one question. Do you want to try it? You are driving in a small car and it is a raging rain storm outside. Every now and then flashes of lightening and the startlingly loud claps of thunder fills the air. As you drive careful not to start hydroplaning you see three people huddled at a bus stop. You look carefully and you see that one person is an old lady who is sick to the point of dying. The second person happens to be an old friend of yours who had once saved you from drowning. And the third person actually upon closer examination looks like the man or woman of your dreams. This looks like the person you have been waiting for your whole life to meet. Now all three would like a ride out of the rain. But here is the problem. You have a small car and you can take only one person. So what choice would you make? If you take the old lady, you could get her to the hospital and save your life. If you take your old friend, it could be your only chance to do something nice for someone who saved your life. But this could also be your only chance to connect with the person you have been waiting your whole life for. So the question is, what would you do? Who would you choose? Each choice you make will say something about how you think it a given situation. You want to minute to think about your choice? Well, don't worry, I am not going to have you shout answers. But one person from the 200 interviewed had no hesitation as to what he would do. And he got the job. You want to know what answer he gave? He said he would give his car keys to his old friend and ask him to take the old lady to the hospital while he waited at the bus stop with the girl of this dreams. A brilliant bit of out of the box thinking isn't it? Now you and I are not going to be caught in this exact same situation. But as Christ followers, Christ wants us to very carefully think through of the situations we find ourselves it. And the passage we are dealing with today is about the mind games that the enemy plays with us that are part

of the spiritual battles and we will only be able to gain victory if we are careful with how we think through the situation we are in.

Today we are going to look at how Jesus handles a mind game that was thrown at him. Let me start by laying out the issues in this intense back and forth between Jesus and the crowd he is addressing in our John 7 section for today. First off the people in the crowd must have been really surprised to find that their speaker for the day was the very person the religious authorities were trying to locate because they were busy scheming about ways to eliminate him. Actually, the only reason I think they gave Jesus the opportunity to speak then was because they thought he might say something that they could use against him. Anyway last week I addressed the issues that Jesus preached on, recorded in verse 16 to 19. At the end of that section, Jesus lays it on thick, by exposing the plot against him by telling the crowd, “Moses gave you the law but none of you obey it. In fact you are trying to kill me.”

This is where our passage for today opens. Because the people bold enough to speak in the crowd you can imagine were the religious authorities anyway and the first words out of their mouth were, “Who is trying to kill you? Adding, “You are demon possessed” implying that Jesus was demon possessed for thinking that they were trying to kill him”. Now we know that Jesus does not through false accusations around. Actually, the first time, the plot against Jesus is mentioned is at the beginning of chapter 7 just before Jesus’ conversation with his family. Verse 1 of this chapter it says, “He wanted to stay out of Judea, where the Jewish leaders were plotting his death.” But do you recall what happened then? At that point of time Jesus, it was Jesus’ brothers who were completely oblivious of this threat against Jesus and were giving him this big spiel about why Jesus should go to Jerusalem and show himself to everyone instead of hiding at home. Fast forward a little bit and now Jesus is in the middle of Jerusalem among the very people who are plotting to eliminate him. And he looks them in the face and exposes them. And how do they respond? They respond by smearing Jesus’ credibility by saying he is demon

possessed, and asking him in effect for proof by saying, “Who is trying to kill you?” This brings us to the first mind game that is being played out here. It is what psychologists call “gaslighting”. This is nothing but deception. And the deception is this. The enemy is doing something sinister and at the same time, wants you to believe that there is nothing going on and if you see something it is because you are crazy. You see Satan is a deceiver and in 2 Cor 11:3 Apostle Paul warns us about this. It says, “But I am afraid that, **as** the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” You see, the enemy wants to lead you and me away from Christ but he can only be successful if we are not aware that he is trying to lead us away. This is the Mind Game of Deception. Now in Jesus’ case they were trying to kill him. But you will say, how will that affect anything because Jesus came to die anyway right? Right, but you see, if Jesus was too naive and blind to be aware of the plot against him, he would have been captured before he had completed his teaching and before he had prepared his disciples. Because even though his disciples did not get it and were scattered when Jesus was eventually captured, Jesus had explained everything so well to them that in the end it all clicked in their minds well enough that they were able to explain everything to others who had never met Jesus and pass on the message faithfully from one generation to the next till 2000 years later even we get it. This is what the enemy wanted to avoid at all costs. The enemy’s real goal was to have Jesus killed in secret. Matt 26:4 says, they conspired to secretly arrest Jesus and kill him. Because if Jesus died without people knowing about it and without his followers being able to explain what happened, there would be no Christian movement today. So even though Jesus came to die, he had to make sure that he gave himself into his enemies hands completely on His terms. And the only way to not let the enemy succeed is to not fall for the Mind Game of Deception.

Let me show you how this deception works in our daily lives. In this country pornography is protected as a free speech right. It is actually the enemy’s way of

capturing the minds of mostly men but sometimes women as well so that people of the opposite sex are objectified with the end goal of eliminating the capacity of physical and emotional intimacy. The voice of the enemy deceptively says, “who is trying to mess your mind? This is about your freedom”. Don’t fall for this deception of the enemy, my friends. It is not about freedom of speech, the enemy is trying to destroy your mind. Don’t fall for it. Take the issue of abortion. The enemy wants you to believe it is a freedom of choice issue. It is not a freedom of choice issue my friends! It is an issue of the life of an unborn child. Take the issue of guns in this country. They say laws don’t make a difference. The only thing that can stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun. Well, we have 300 million guns in circulation. That is one for every human being in the country. SO how come we have 33,000 people being killed every year because of guns when we have so many good guys with guns. Remember the enemy wants to steal, kill and destroy. And to achieve that end goal the enemy will pull out every deception possible. It is our job to see through the deception. But even these examples may not reach close enough home. So let me bring it even closer. Every time someone says or does something and you feel angered by it and are tempted to react, it is the enemy trying to deceive you that this person is your enemy, and therefore you need to react in kind. That is how Cain was deceived. The Biblical Cain saw his brother Abel has his enemy who needed to be killed when all Abel had done was to offer a sincere sacrifice to God. Abel’s offering had nothing to do with Cain, but the enemy managed to sow so much hatred that life was taken in the end. When hatred or anger towards someone flares up in your heart, remember it is the enemy trying to get you to do something terrible towards this person. Remember no flesh and blood is your enemy. It is Satan’s ploy to get blood on your hands. The way you counter deception is to remember *1 Peter 5:8* ⁸ *Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* A mind always alert to the enemy’s desire to deceive will help us to see through the ploy and overcome it. If you pray and ask God to help

you stay alert and stay away of the enemy's end goal will help you gain the victory over the mind game of Deception.

There is a second mind game that Jesus exposes for us in verses 21-24. This is the mind game of Distraction. In Distraction, the end goal is to prevent you from seeing what God is doing. Distraction is achieved by focusing your attention on trivial things. Did you know that every magic trick that involves sleight of hand works on the basis of successfully distracting you? That is also why every magic show has very attractive women as the magicians helpers. I am not making this up. The helpers are a bigger part of the act than you realize. And it works every time. Moving back to our scriptural text, in Jesus' case the enemy is using the classic distraction move to take the people's focus away from the incredible healing sign Jesus performed. Remember at the beginning of chapter 5 he has healed a lame man? While this was a really big even, all the religious authorities wanted to talk about was the fact that Jesus had violated the Sabbath. That perceived Sabbath violation charge has snowballed and now the authorities are actively plotting to kill Jesus. That is where we find ourselves in today's text. And what I want to draw your attention to is how Jesus handles the enemy's distraction mind game.

What Jesus tells these people is this. "I did one miracle on the Sabbath and you were amazed". Now to clarify, the original Greek word translated "amazed" in this context should be read as "shocked". So the religious authorities are shocked that the miracle was performed on the Sabbath. But Jesus points out that their shock is completely ridiculous because there are many things they themselves do on the Sabbath. The example Jesus gives in this instance is the "circumcision" ritual. As per Moses' Law of Circumcision, boys would have to be circumcised on the 8th day of their birth. If the 8th day fell on the Sabbath, guess what, they would be circumcised anyway. So the legal argument Jesus is making is that, if it is Ok to circumcise on the Sabbath, how come it is not Ok to heal on the Sabbath? In other words with some careful thinking, Jesus exposes the stupidity of making an offense out of Sabbath heal. And not only does Jesus expose

the stupidity of their accusation, he also ends the conversation by letting people know, “if you want to judge an issue correctly, you have to look beneath the surface”. That means, when you are confronted with some piece of information, don’t take it for its surface value. Know there is always more than meets the eye. You have to be curious, dig deeper, examine multiple sources, think through the issues carefully and then come to a conclusion. Now you and I are not born with the understanding to deal with the situations the enemy will throw at you. But what we need to do is pray for understanding like the palmist does in [Psalm 119:169](#) There it says “Let my cry come before you, O Lord; give me understanding according to your word!” When we cry out for understanding, God will enable you and me to look below the surface and discern the truth and not be lead astray by the distractions.

Two mind games that we need to be aware of. Deception that aims to obscure the enemy’s true intentions. You overcome the deception by staying alert to your environment. The second mind game is distracting you away from what God is doing. And you overcome distraction by praying for God to give you true understanding you can judge between the rabbit trail and the essence of the matter.

Remember, we cannot overcome the enemies mind games by relying on ourselves. We doing it by relying on God to transform our minds to cope with the situation we are in. Romans 12:2 says 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. **Then you will be able to discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.**

Whether the enemy is trying to deceive or distract us, may we be found victorious in all the mind games the enemy throws at us. Let us pray.