

30. By the name of Jesus

March 2, 2014

If you are like me, we cherish the name of Jesus our Lord because He saved our sinful souls with His atoning sacrifice. We cringe when we hear someone use His precious name as a cuss word. When I get to hang around with the Pima County Regional SWAT team during their trainings, I hear some of the SWAT operators using our Lord's name in vain. I often threaten them that I would use laundry soap to wash their mouths. Then, they say, "Pardon my French, chaplain."

Those who believe in the Lord Jesus know the power of His name. When a believer who lost hope cries out in Jesus' name, the Lord reaches out and gives him a renewed hope; when a young mom whose baby's tiny body is burning with fever cries out to the Lord in Jesus' name; the Lord of all creations reaches down and touches the baby's body and cools it; when a believer who is facing a spiritual enemy that comes in like a flood cries out to the Lord in Jesus' name, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up His defense to protect the believer; a former addict who is under a tremendous temptation to go back to the addiction cries out to the Lord in Jesus' name, the Lord chases away the temptation and strengthens the heart of the former addict.

Many miracles were done in Jesus' name; many demons have been cast out in His name; and many sicknesses have left in Jesus' name.

Then, someone would ask, "You mean that it is like a magic spell? You just say the name of Jesus, all these things will happen?" No. First, you have to accept Him as your Savior and Lord. This takes to the second point, you have to have faith in Him as the Second Person in the Godhead and God Himself. Without these two, it is just a name. The power is not in the name, but rather the Lord behind His name.

This morning we are going to witness the power of God in action against the evil spirits. Don't you ever think that spiritual battle is something preachers talk about during their church services to scare you. It is very real. It happens all around us.

A. MIRACLES BY PAUL'S SWEATBANDS

Acts 19:11-12 Now God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, 12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.

These handkerchiefs and aprons were literally sweatbands that Paul used as he worked at his tentmaking job. They were ordinary items, not like the sacred charms or prayer cloths used by some preachers today who promise similar healings. Yet the Lord adopted them as His tools to change lives.

Here is the web site image of a well-known TV preacher for his "anointed prayer cloth" that can be supposedly "transferred to you if you only send him your very best seed of faith." Of course, that is money, they don't want you to send them real flower seeds. Then he will send you "the tangible transfer of God's anointing for your miracle." Merchandising God's Word for their profit. I am sure that the Lord will have a long chat with the people like this preacher.

When the apostle allowed them to take his sweatbands, Paul didn't beg for money from the sick people's families so that his ministry in Asia Minor could continue. He didn't ask for a penny. Prayer for someone should be considered as an honor and a privilege, not a means of gain.

1 Timothy 6:5 useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.

We really don't know how this worked, other than the same way that the shadow of Peter or the hem of Jesus' robe might heal. The item became a point of contact of one's faith and that person released faith in Jesus as the Healer.

It might have started by accident or perhaps a person in need of healing took a sweatband from Paul in a superstitious manner and was healed. But it became a pattern that others imitated.

Remember, the city of Ephesus was full of occult concepts from their goddess Diana to every little so-called gods. The Ephesian believers were coming out of their former belief and not fully understanding. God graciously stooped down to meet them even in their crude superstitions. This never means that God was pleased with their superstition, but that in His mercy He overlooked their ignorance to meet a need.

B. LOUSY EXORCISTS

Acts 19:13-16 Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." 14 Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" 16 Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

In 1973, Warner Brothers Productions released a movie called "Exorcist" which scared many people and made them aware that there was such a thing as 'exorcism.' In that movie and other Hollywood movies, God can barely restrain the evil power. There is an old Swedish proverb for that: "In pig's eyes."

No one ever actually could cast demons out of people by their own power until Jesus came to this earth. Since then, every Tom, Dick, and Harry tried to cast out demons, like these seven sons of Sceva.

Folks, please note that demon possession is very real. If you are a born-again Christian, you have the Holy Spirit within you. That means that you are possessed by the Holy Spirit. The major difference between the Holy Spirit's possession of you and demon possession of a person is that the Holy Spirit allows your free will, but demons do not, rather they drive that possessed person to do unthinkable things.

At that time, there were Jewish exorcists who practiced their trade with a lot of superstition and ceremony. Here, a group of traveling Jewish exorcists tried to imitate what they thought was Paul's formula for success. However, it was a unusual and rather embarrassing thing for them to use the name of Jesus Christ whom they crucified. To the seven sons of Sceva, the name of Jesus was nothing more than a part of their marketing gimmicks.

While I was studying this portion, these brothers reminded me of the snake oil medicine salesman whom I saw in one of those old western movies. Their snake oil could cure a toothache to paralysis and everything in between. Just other scamming con artists.

Since these traveling exorcists had no personal relationship with the Savior, they had to invoke the name of Paul as well. But their scheme did not work. They only knew that Jesus was the God of Paul, not their own God. In the same way, there are many people – many churchgoers – who will perish in hell because they have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They only know “the Jesus the pastor preaches” or “the Jesus my spouse believes in” instead of the Jesus of their own salvation.

In addition to that, you cannot fight against your spiritual enemies – demons with someone else’s spiritual weapons.

1 Samuel 17:37-40 Moreover David said, “The Lord, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” And Saul said to David, “Go, and the Lord be with you!” 38 So Saul clothed David with his armor, and he put a bronze helmet on his head; he also clothed him with a coat of mail. 39 David fastened his sword to his armor and tried to walk, for he had not tested them. And David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these, for I have not tested them.” So David took them off. 40 Then he took his staff in his hand; and he chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.

You see, Saul’s armor was built for 52 Extra Large while David was 36 Regular. He was drowning in Saul’s armor and his bronze helmet was so big for David that it came down to his chin. He could not wear Saul’s armor.

However, David did not face Goliath unarmed. He had much better armor than Saul’s. Saul had a bronze helmet, but David had the helmet of salvation; Saul had a coat of mail, but David had a breastplate of God’s righteousness; Saul had a sword, but David had the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. David had the whole armor of God.

You know that famous battle. David’s smooth stone that was propelled from his sling sank deep between Goliath’s headlights. As he was falling, Goliath armor bearers yelled, “Timber!” Goliath was really stoned and out cold. Goliath’s friends used to call him “Golly.” Now that he was dead, they said, “Bye, Golly.”

When these Jewish exorcists tried their method, apparently, evil spirits knew who their enemies were – in this case, Jesus and Paul, and they also knew what the seven sons of Sceva were doing was nothing more than a cheap imitation and they did not have the authority to cast them out of the man.

God used the scheme to defeat Satan and to bring conviction to the believers who were still involved in magical arts. Instead of disgracing the name of Jesus, the event magnified His name and caused the Word of God to spread even more rapidly.

C. SEVERING THE TIES TO THEIR IDOLS AND MAGIC

Acts 19:17-20 This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. 19 Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

Ephesus was a stronghold of satan. Here many evil things both superstitious and satanic were practiced. Books containing formula for sorcery and other ungodly and forbidden arts were plentiful in that city. Before the sons of Sceva incident, many believers did not know they were involved in the demonic things, but now they were prompted to renounce any remaining connection to the demonic. They also renounced the demonic influences in their lives by confessing and by burning their magic books, disregarding whatever value they had.

These books and scrolls full of magic charms, and incantations were well known in Ephesus, and they were expensive. The value of fifty thousand pieces of silver today has been estimated at anywhere between \$1-5 million.

What a dazzling bonfire that must have been! However, an even greater fire was blazing in the believers' hearts as they released their worldly attachments and committed themselves to the Lord.

As with the Ephesians, the Holy Spirit searches out and exposes our hidden closet of worldly junk. When He does, we also must confess their existence in our lives to the Lord, disclose our preoccupation with them, and then destroy them. Admittedly, the bonfire is painful and costly, but it is also freeing and gloriously life-changing and severing the ties to the former worldly connection.

Christians must do this also today, removing books, magazines, images, computer files, statues, charms, games, or whatever else might have connections with demonic spirits, ancestor worship, and occult stuff. You should destroy them so these things that they would be of no use to others. You may say, "These things are important to me. They are a part of my heritage." Then, I ask you to ask yourself, "What are they representing, God or idol worship?" Nothing should be more important than your Savior Jesus. He died for your sins. Is discarding worthless idols too much for you to do for Jesus?

1 John 2:15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) Sever any tie that takes you back to your sin.

Remember that our sinful patterns often have their roots in our 'before-Christ' years. With each refusal to break any connection, our hearts become harder and harder.

2) Be pliable to God's commands regardless what costs you. Because He does not ask you to discard something that you need for godly living.