

**Series: Battlefield:
fighting the flesh, the world, the devil
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John 8:36-45
Spiritual warfare**

I promise we do not work with Daily Nation and that was not a deliberate ad for them. But you have to admit their marketing team did a good job. And I fully agree with them on this one thing: lies have the power to change you.

One of Jesus' most famous statements is, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Jesus says this line at the onset of his most elaborate conversation and sermon on Spiritual warfare. As if the real problem of Spiritual warfare is one of just being free of lies? Is it not about casting out demons, breaking curses and spells as we have often seen on TV?

Yes, that is part of it. And like we talked about last week, there are evil spirits with free will and agency to accomplish it that often come against God's will. They can and have afflicted the natural world, both human beings and nature. But what if it is not how the enemy mainly fights?

I was in Nairobi trying to a series of meetings with different people. Now, when I have to do this I have found it easy to just sit at a coffee shop in a mall and just have the faces on the opposite end of the table change.

But one of my meetings would not come to a mall because a few governments had warned that there seemed to be some Al-Shabaab activities and people needed to be careful and if possible avoid crowded places. From previous attacks, she had figured being in a mall was a bad idea.

How are we still here despite a prolonged and expensive military war in Somalia against the jihadist group since October 2011?

2 weeks ago again, US president Joe Biden announced that they had killed the leader of the Jihadist group ISIS. Yet in 2019, that is also what his predecessor Donald Trump announced. It seems they killed one leader who was then replaced by another. Or even the existence of ISIS itself, is it not inherited the place of Al-Qaeda?

And just to be clear the issue of religious extremism, violence and even terrorism is not a Muslim thing. The church, down history when it was at the height of political power, has also caused terror. Even today there are, in some countries gun-wielding believers in forests taking military training in the name of Jesus.

Alongside the chaos that took place in the US last year were Christian signs and symbols, prayer and chants.

In our country church members breaking into fights on a Sunday morning and feeling completely justified is not new.

It is just often easier to see the faults of others and feel completely justified in your stance especially if you are convinced, as we are, that you stand on the side of truth. But let us be clear, violence has never been the way of Jesus.

How is it that despite the military resources, personnel and so much money poured into the fight against Jihadi terrorism, it just does not seem to go away? It may be the classic mistake of fighting the wrong way.

Paul encouraged we should be ready to stand against the enemy and his schemes. It is impossible to beat your enemy if you do not know how they fight.

The reason beating jihadism has been impossible is that the world keeps trying to fight an ideology, a philosophy with guns and bombs. And that is hard and impossible. What you end up with is slain militants replaced by new ones who are more committed and maybe a lil' smarter to beat your earlier tactics.

It is the same with Spiritual Warfare. We need to know the enemy and his primary weapon. Last week, I made the case that we do have an enemy, the devil. But how do you even fight him? One must know how he fights.

The enemy's primary tool has always been lies and so Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free." The fight with the devil is primarily a fight to liberate our minds from the captivity and slavery of lies. And we do that with the weapon of truth.

That is what we will talk about today.

Let's pray.

So let us start with what makes human beings stand out from other animals. Or if you like the paradigm of evolution, what made the Homo Sapiens species outdo the other hominins? Some scientists are arguing that is our ability to hold ideas and

imagination. We hold ideas in our minds and then act them out with our bodies and create a reality.

This is quite the gift. It is how we give birth to new things; like relationships, family, music and art, this talk. It is how architects have concepts of buildings and how engineers build things. It all starts with imagination, an idea, that is not yet real. Then with our bodies, we bring unreality into reality. That is one key feature that makes homo sapiens or human beings stand out.

But this gift is also our undoing. It is also possible to hold ideas that do not correspond to reality. These are called lies. and then with our bodies, we live them out as if they were true. Sadly we then create such realities around us.

We all live out our lives from certain mental patterns, mental maps if you will which are just a collection of ideas.

One example in your mind now you hold a mental map on how to get from Agora to your home. It is something in your mind that you live from every weekend you come here.

Now that is a bit tangible. But you also hold ideas about things that are intangible. Ideas that help you answer the crucial questions of life. Like what is justice? What is marriage? What is sexuality? What is democracy? Ideas about faith and religion and morality. These form your worldview or the story from which you live out your life.

Now the ideas we have can either correspond to reality or not. Reality is what you run into when you are wrong. They are true when they correspond to reality, they are lies when they do not.

I remember when I was a boy after watching the Peter Pan movie, Hook, I wanted so much to fly. I went to the roof of the apartment building my grandmother lived in and wanted to jump off because all I needed was one happy thought. But something stopped me. For some reason, I knew that idea did not correspond with reality. If I did jump, the reality called gravity would have met me.

If these ideas are true, you show up well to reality and you do not jump off a rooftop after watching Peter Pan. But if the ideas are lies, you live out of a lie. It is the same case about our ideas on the important questions in life. Who is God? Who am I and what is the right way to live? If your ideas about these are wrong, you show up to reality wrong. It is like jumping off the rooftop after watching a movie. Reality will still hit you.

Now, the sad thing is the same way we make our imaginations come true by living them out, when we hold lies in our minds, we can live them out making them true. And that is the danger in Spiritual warfare. When the enemy lies and we buy those lies, we start living those out. This is sadly how lies become true.

Let us say for example you hold the idea that you are unlovable and not worthy of love. For whatever reason. That is a lie. What happens is that you start living that lie out; You become standoffish, you let people in relationships treat you with disrespect, you would stop caring for yourself all because you thought you did not matter.

You will live out with your body the lie you hold on to in your mind. Over time, that lie starts to become true about you and indeed people in relationships with you begin to find it very difficult to love you. And you in response, will only create more ideas that tell you that you are unlovable.

So ideas, turn into behaviour or habit, behaviour and habits that are repeated become a character and our character gives birth to new ideas formed after itself and the process continues.

This is where the battle is. To either be formed into Christlikeness by truth or be deformed into the image of Satan by lies.

We all know the story of Eve and her encounter with the devil at the garden of Eden. Whether you are a believer or not, this is such a famous story. And paradigmatic of the human condition.

And before you turn away because there is a talking snake, remember even the ancients or people from many years ago knew that snakes do not talk. It is not a discovery that we moderns have made now because of science. So maybe we should pay more attention to what else is happening in the story of Eve in the garden.

But however you look at it, the devil does not attack Eve with demons or a disease or a gun. What does He do? He lies. He gives them ideas that do not correspond to reality.

Spiritual warfare is primarily a battle to believe truth over lies and have our minds liberated by truth. That is why Paul writes that we should be transformed by the renewal of our minds.

John Chapter 8. A bit of context, Jesus is teaching and there are Pharisees around him and they hear him, and they get into a debate. But at this point, the Pharisees have been looking for ways to kill Jesus.

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. 35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. 36 So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me because you have no room for my word. 38 I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father.[b]"

39 "Abraham is our father," they answered.

"If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would[c] do what Abraham did. 40 As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. 41 You are doing the works of your own father."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. 43 Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. 44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. 45 Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!"

So this is Jesus' most elaborate teaching on the devil. The chief enemy of our soul. So what is Jesus teaching and our inference in Spiritual warfare:

1. The devil is real, what we captured last weekend.

When this lacks in your worldview, people become your enemy. It becomes the left or the right. It becomes your brother or your spouse or people of that religion.

2. The devil aims to bring destruction.

The enemy does not love life. He is out to murder. And destroy it all.

3. The enemy's main scheme is lies or deception.

Jesus says when the enemy lies, he speaks his native language. That he has been lying from the beginning. And when we buy into his lies, we begin to become like him as these sons of Abraham had now become the seed of the devil.

John Said that the son of man came to destroy the works of the enemy yet Jesus primarily came as a teacher. What teaching does is it gives us different ideas to live by. Jesus was replacing wrong stories and beliefs and lies with the truth; this is the vision of the Kingdom of God.

He would often say, "You have been told this... but now let me tell you." Or teach with stories giving new ideas. The work of good teachers is to give you new ideas, to help you form better mental maps that correspond to reality. This is what Jesus was doing.

His main way of fighting the battle and destroying the work of the enemy was by liberating people from his lies, with the truth.

This series is leading us up to Easter. The biggest moment of Spiritual warfare where Jesus won the victory and made embarrassed the powers of hell, sin and the world.

And a few hours before the cross, he is before the government official who had the power to set him free or crucify him. Pilate asks him if he was a King.

Now some of us miss the impact of that moment. In that time, to be a King meant that you go to war. It is almost like how we regard our heads of state as the commander in chief of the forces of a country. To be a King meant you are at the head of the military.

So as Pilate, the regional head of an oppressive government that is partnering with the devil, is asking Jesus a loaded question. If Jesus is a King, then these 2 Kingdoms are about to clash, and Jesus is at the head of it.

Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

"You are a king, then!" said Pilate.

Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

John 18:5-37

For Jesus, his purpose and the real battle is not one of guns and swords but one of truth against lies. And all those on the side of truth, are with him.

For you shall know the truth and truth shall set you free.

I am the way, the truth, the life. Jesus says he is the centre point of all reality. Unless you live from him, you are not showing up well to reality.

Would you like to put your faith in Jesus today for the first time?

Stay still for a few moments and just invite the Holy Spirit to start showing you what ideas you have bought into that are not true. Some are so deeply hidden in us. Some you can see in the person you are forming into.

Where are you is God saying you are not showing up to reality well?

Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." He added that His sheep follow him because they recognise His voice.

Can you recognise the voice of Jesus?

There is no shadow he won't light up, no wall he won't climb up, no lie he won't tear down coming after us. God would like to tear down the lies you have believed about him, about yourself and others and life.

Let's Pray