# **“Boot Camp Final: Deliver us from Evil”**

**24th November 2024 – 11am and 6pm**

**Acts 19:11-20**

We come to the end of the …

Bootcamp for mission – being prepared to be sent out

Equipped, trained and briefed.

Any army needs to be fleet of foot, manoeuvrable, agile, able to move swiftly and recover quickly.

Imagine what it would be like to be sent into battle with a ball and chain around your ankle or to return to base deeply affected by some of the enemy’s actions

We need to know how to avoid minefields, remain active as Christians and when things go wrong, how to recover.

The enemy once us hobbled, neutralised, handicapped and at below full combat effectiveness.

I remember before the QBP soldiers were told not to drink, get an early night in order to be effective in the morning

Yet some succumbed to temptation and went out and got drunk and as a result they suffered on the parade. Some keeled over. They became casualties instead of fighting men.

So it can be with us in our Christian walk.

We can do things that open the door to not just spiritual attack but also that invite the enemy in.

Christians believe that there is a personal force of evil that we refer to as the devil, Satan or the enemy. Jesus confronted him face-to-face. The devil leads his legion of fallen angels who rebelled against God and it is these fallen angels that are now unclean or impure spirits or Demons.

But to start with let’s consider Jo’s analogy from last Sunday – that we can invite the enemy ***to a place at our table***.

St Paul describes this reality for us ***before*** we become Christians

*2 You were dead through the trespasses and sins 2in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient.  Eph 2:1-2*

But the truth is that we can invite the enemy to a place at our table AFTER we become Christians.

We can do this knowingly – we can do things that we know are wrong

**AND**, we can also invite him in ***unwittingly***.

What we are looking at today is how we can be set free to enjoy all that God has in store for us,

or how to be delivered from evil

– just as we pray in the Lord’s prayer.

I want to explain

* what the bible has to say about what Jesus often callsevil or unclean spirits,
* how people are still vulnerable to such malign influences **even in the 21st Century**
* how they can even impact us as believers (in a different way)
* and most importantly how we can **very simply** be rid of them ***when we know we have Jesus on our side and we operate from his authority.***

In our reading we learn of a pretty frightening encounter between an evil spirit and some Jewish exorcists that thought they’d give casting out the demon a go.

We read that it did not go well for them!

And that’s a health check for anyone who might find themselves getting excited about taking on evil things in their own strength.

Before we learn some lessons **from their failure** let’s first ask ourselves:

***how did the demon get into the afflicted person?***

The passage doesn’t tell us directly but at the end we read that many who practised magic *confessed and disclosed their practices*

It seems likely that this practice of occultic magic was like a gateway drug to this affliction.

In fact it stands to reason that the most obvious way to invite an unclean spirit into your life is via dabbling in the occult.

The occult doesn’t just mean going to some crazy event dressed weirdly chanting around a pentagram

It can be far more subtle **– *even through things that our society sees as common place***

* Having your cards read
* Horoscopes
* Fortune telling
* Divination
* Ouija boards
* Watching horror films

Basically anything weird that is not of God

It doesn’t automatically mean that anyone doing one of these things will necessarily be afflicted by a spirit

– often times nothing happens at all,

and that can con us into thinking that there’s nothing to evil (one of Satan’s favourite tricks!)

***but if something is supernaturally powered,***

and it ***isn’t*** the Holy Spirit providing the power,

Guess who is powering it?!!!!

Satan!

Why is dabbling in this sort of stuff so dangerous?

Well let’s see what scripture has to say:

We see from Deut. 18 that ***God warned Israel*** that when they entered the promised land that they would ***have to be careful not to pick up the spiritual practices of the Canaanites***,

***spiritual practices that the Bible clearly sees as demonically motivated.***

These **practices can both be fuelled by,**

**and also** attract,

curses and **unclean spirits/demons.**

*9When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you, you must not learn to imitate the* ***abhorrent*** *practices of those nations. 10No one shall be found among you who makes a son or daughter pass through fire, or who practices divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, 11or one who casts spells, or who consults ghosts or spirits, or who seeks oracles from the dead. 12For whoever does these things is abhorrent to the Lord; it is because of such* ***abhorrent*** *practices that the Lord your God is driving them out before you. 13You* ***must remain completely loyal to the Lord your God****.* Deut 18:9-13

When God forbids us from doing something, there is ***always*** a reason.

We learnt two weeks ago that there is a spiritual realm and the enemy uses his minions to disrupt our lives through deceit and temptation.

And when we lower our guard, when we sin, when we live against God’s best will for us, we open a door.

With the occult we are in effect trespassing into the enemy’s territory and dousing ourselves with petrol and then striking a match!– so don’t go there!

The New Testament has many accounts of people who are being impacted by demons or unclean spirits being set free.

The accounts are graphic and sometimes can be a little alarming to read about,

and mercifully in the West we don’t see much of those manifestations today,

although if our culture becomes neo-pagan as Bishop Graham Tomlin suggests it might,

who knows what may come out of the woodwork.

But in my ministry here in England I could say we hardly ever see anything and if we did see what some call a ‘major possession’ thankfully there is a well worked out way of dealing with that with trained advisors under a bishop’s license, so that maverick ministers don’t cause harm and damage.

As I said before Authority is important.

But CS Lewis suggested that the main tactic of the enemy here in the West was to persuade people he didn’t really exist.

Do we know for sure that that because very few people here seem to be affected that Satan isn’t at work,

or is what is happening much more subtle than a horror movie so that we live in blissful ignorance?

Do we have enough people with the spiritual awareness to discern when evil is about?

We let me share my story:

I went to see a genteel elderly couple – he ex-Army, living in Wiltshire –

* 9 month waiting list
* Morning being questioned
* Any deaths? 3 grandparents, aunt, father, wife and son.
* Lunch
* Afternoon – “I come against the spirit of …”!

I had no personal sense I was affected

I had been baptised by full immersion

Been confirmed

Had my back miraculously healed

And yet something unclean – possibly passed down through the generations was affecting my life and by the grace of God

and by the name of Jesus was dealt with!

There are two words we need to understand:

Oppression and possession

Possession is when a person is literally taken over by some force.

Extremely rare and we will speak no more of that **– that’s when experts most certainly need to be called in.**

Oppression is simply when someone is affected by something unhelpful.

I believe that Christians can be oppressed but not possessed.

That was me.

Things like areas of unconfessed sin create spiritual darkness – which can attract things we don’t want.

And these can stay with us ***until we repent*** and take action to rid ourselves of them.

Other things that can open the door to such things, in addition to occult involvement **can be no direct fault of our own – and that’s important to realise**.

These include:

**Idolatry** – worshipping other Gods – having idols in our houses – dabbling in eastern mysticism

**Prostitution**

**Unforgiveness**

**Freemasonery**

**Persistent sin**

**Being cursed**

**Trauma** like rape

**Abuse**.

**Sexual abuse**

It would be so much simpler to understand if for example we got drunk and played with a Ouija board and then felt something dark, unclean start to influence us.

We’d know what had happened and be able to seek help.

But often unclean spirits can start to affect us from our pasts – I in some cases going back generations.

We don’t even know they are there.

We will I hope be running a ‘Freedom in Christ’ course in the New Year which does what it says on the tin.

It deals with these sorts of issues in a methodical, prayerful and of course biblical manner.

My point is that we can invite these unclean spirits and we can also suffer with them totally unknowingly.

So how can we know if we have an unclean spirit trying to separate us from God through unhelpful and ungodly actions?

One way is to pray with someone who has the spiritual gift of discerning spirits but they are rare people!

The other way is to ask yourself what is going on in your life that you feel is holding you back or seeking to separate you from God.

Do you suffer from any of the following?

• Psychic abilities not centred on Jesus.

• Night visitations by an evil presence

• Irrational paralysing fear

• Uncontrollable compulsive thoughts -, cursing, violence

• Uncontrolled compulsive behaviours - sexual sin, anger, addictions like drugs and alcohol

• Difficulty in acknowledging Jesus Lordship and in praying

• Pre-occupation with thoughts of death, despair, or hopelessness

• Voices in your head telling you lies and making ungodly suggestions

• Sickness and pains in body for no good reason

Now all of these may have perfectly natural explanations, but if any of those resonate and you’re not sure why you feel stuck, you feel unfree,

it would ***always be worth praying*** with others to discern whether there is something going on.

Can I be clear here?

I do not want you leaving here thinking that everything that is going wrong in your life is a directly attributable to the enemy!

So much of life’s travails we cause ourselves through bad choices or simple misfortune.

Remember that quote from CS Lewis **I referred to in my earlier talk?**

‘*There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.*

***They only impact us if we give ground to them.***

So don’t!

Practice Ephesians 6 and out on the armour of God

1 John 4 says:

***4****You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because* ***the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world****.*

Remember Christ already has the victory!

I just want you to know your enemy and his tactics!

Did you know there was a cure for leprosy? But to be cured you need to take the medicine. There is a cure for being oppressed by unclean spirits but you need to take the medicine, you need to go to the foot of the cross, repent and believe and be washed clean in the blood of the lamb.

**Finally**, what if you think there is something going on?

Or what if you think that given past behaviour you feel you might benefit from prayer just in case?

Well the good news is that there is nothing to fear for in the name of Jesus there is power.

We see in scripture that the name of Jesus has the power to set people free.

Unclean spirits recognise the name of Jesus and cannot stand against him.

Looking at our passage we see this demonstrated powerfully: the demons say *Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?*

You see those seeking to cast out the demon were not followers of Jesus – they were Jews not Christians – and the demon had nothing to fear and the result was painful.

Those in Christ have nothing to fear but prayers will only really be effective for those who have fully submitted their lives to the Lord.

Someone asked me recently to pray for them to rid them and I said I couldn’t until they repented and believed.

You see if you do manage to pray effectively as Jesus teaches but the person you are praying for has no spiritual defences because they are not fully submitted to Jesus, then the unclean spirits can simply re-enter.

Jesus explains in Matt 12:

***43****“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it.****44****Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order.****45****Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.*

So unless you are repentant and full submitted to the Lord and avoiding sinful activities, these prayers are of little use.

So what are the prayers and what is the process?

Let me use the analogy from medicine

You don’t go and see a consultant straight -off, do you?

You see a nurse or first responder.

Then they might say you need to see a doctor

And then the doctor might say you need to see a consultant.

I also want to make it clear at this point that the CofE has very clear protocols and procedures for this sort of specialised ministry largely due to how this can be so open to abuse and can lead to safeguarding issues.

I am in effect walking into a bit of a minefield by even talking about this so please honour me by sticking to the rules.

In essence the rule is that any deliverance ministry where you know there is something is going on must be conducted by an authorised person. In my medical analogy this is a consultant.

Someone trained and approved by the Diocese.

I will not carry out this ministry – I would pass it up.

We do not do what those Jewish exorcists try to do!

In Tanzania I had a bishop with me and had his authority.

But what we are talking about here is ***helping each other find our inheritance in Christ – true freedom***.

We can all pray for that.

In fact that’s what we do when we pray the Lord’s prayer each day: “Deliver us from evil” (which also translates as “deliver us from the evil one”.

Anyone who is in Christ, who carries the armour of God can call upon the name of Jesus!

And we can pray for ourselves too which is what we are going to do.

The key thing is that we rely on the atonement of Christ

The victory of Christ

And the blood of the lamb

and not on our own authority!

Heb 2:14-15 says

***14****Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—****15****and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.*

So there is freedom from slavery!

and 1 John 4 says:

***4****You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them,****because the one who is in you is greater than the one*** *who is in the world.*

And all Christians have the Holy Spirit in us!

In a moment I am going to pray a freedom prayer over us all.

We can all be the nurses so to speak. We can pray for one another.

We can listen and empathise.

Try and discern.

Try to listen to the Holy Spirit who may guide us as to whether anything needs further attention.

And then if we do discern something we refer to the GP – in this case the elders of the church – and pass it up to them.

On no account does anyone try and engage in this ministry when something has been discerned or is going on without my or a leader’s permission.

You refer it up.

But I want to encourage you to pray, ***for prayer is the most potent weapon.***

So in a moment I’m going to invite us all to stand and then I will lead us all in some prayers.

We’ll join together in a general prayer of confession

We’ll then wait on the Holy Spirit and invite his presence in our lives.

We’ll ask the Holy Spirit to show us anything in our lives that may be a stronghold or an open door or a past incident that may have opened a door

I’ll then say this prayer as a specific confession for anything in particular:

***Lord, I confess I have\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. It was wrong.***

***I renounce my involvement with\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and reject it.***

***Please forgive me\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"):***

This may not be relevant for many/most of us here today, but for a few you may find something comes to mind and ‘better safe than sorry’ why not deal with it right here and now, and then think no more of it again?

So we’ll wait on the Holy Spirit some more and see what he’s doing.

We’re simply following what Jesus once said when he said ‘Go away Satan’ him

- and just as he modelled you can do that to yourself.

And after we’ve done that simply pray again that he fills you top to toe the Spirit and as Jesus promised the Father will give you the Spirit without limit replacing any holds or harm that may have previously been clinging on.

And if anything happens – you may have a sense of fear being replaced with faith,

a fresh encounter with God’s love,

or a little battle as you let go of a past hurt,

don’t worry at all the PMT will help.

We have nothing to worry about!

General Confession

***Absolution: God the father of all mercies, who through the death and resurrection of his son has reconciled the world to himself and sent the Holy Spirit among us for the forgiveness of sins; may God give you pardon and peace and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit***

Wait on Holy Spirit

***Lord, I confess I have\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. It was wrong.***

***I renounce my involvement with\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and reject it.***

***Please forgive me\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_"):***

Wait on Holy Spirit

PMT